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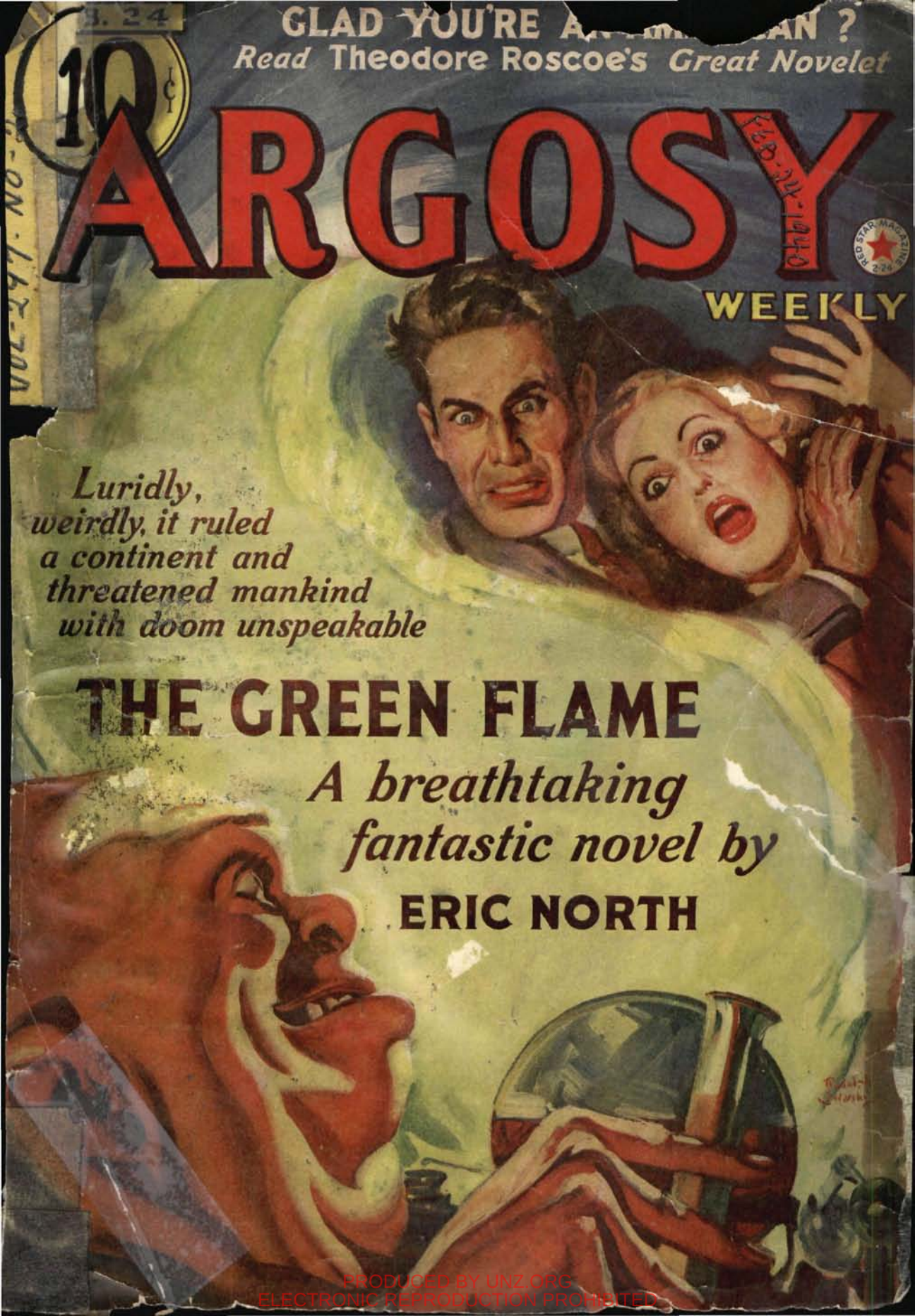

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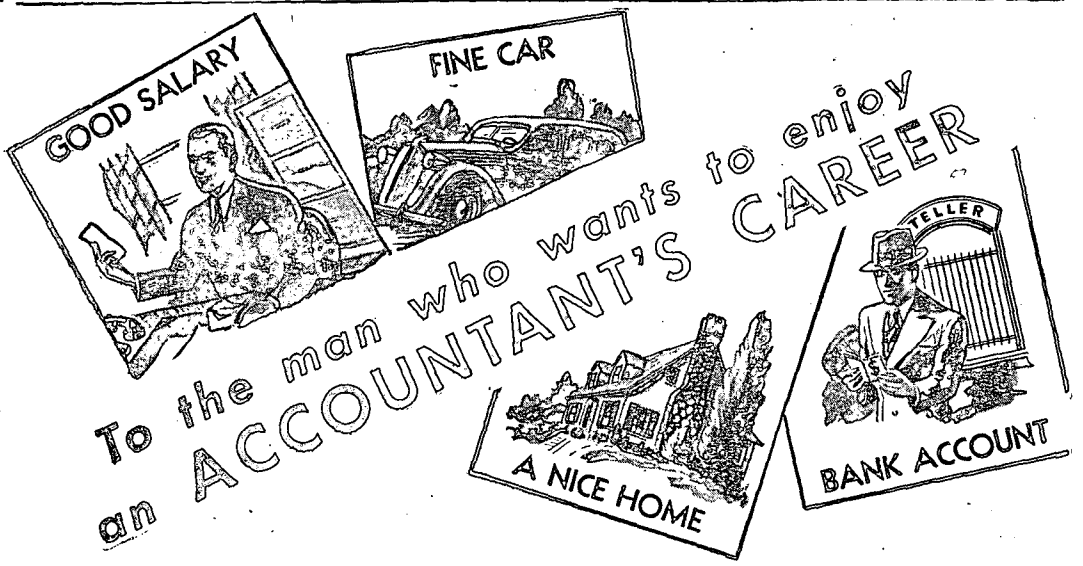

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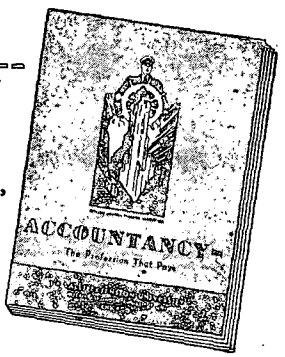

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

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Illustrating The Green Flame

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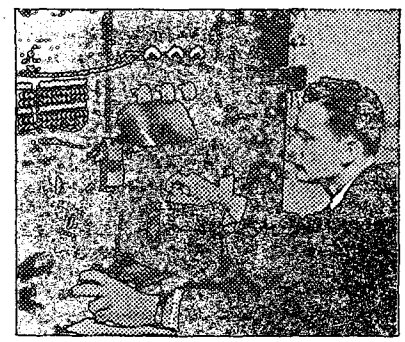

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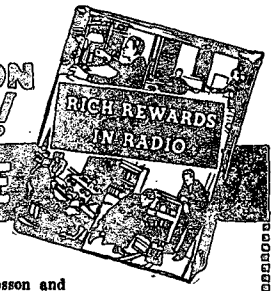

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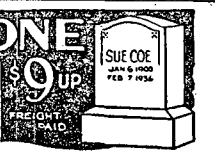

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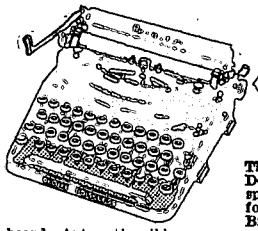

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The Green Flame

By ERIC NORTH

Author of "Three Against the Stars"

Most sinister of criminals was the Toad, whose chilling secret surpassed any knowledge of the scientists. Because of it, his power over the world was more terrible than hatred, more crushing than Armageddon. Beginning a weird and exciting novel of things undreamed of

CHAPTER I

HUMAN PYRE

MY NAME is Maurice John Murchison. I detest writing, and have been betrayed into this effort only by the sheer horror which infects me whenever I am poisoned by thought of Toad. He called himself only that; and the name may well have been received from the christening hands of Satan.

Not one of the high Australian officials who were concerned in Toad's disarming is now alive. Although they emerged from the ordeal apparently in normal good health, they were dying men. That those of us who played minor roles in this terrible drama escaped the aftermath of Toad's poison, I can ascribe only to the goodness of Providence.

Yet the world at large never knew the hideously searing extinction it so narrowly missed in those blackest days. Even now I wonder fearfully whether

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He fell gently forward, like a wax candle bending to the heat, with the ghastly flame sucked down into his body

what has happened may happen again. Is seems improbable, yet my common sense tells me the risk is there. I pray that I may be wrong. . . .

Toad comes into being, so far as my own experience is concerned, on an evening late in November. I had arrived by the express from Sydney at midday, with my entire personal possessions contained in two suitcases, and with barely enough money to insure me against a month of idleness.

I was not unduly apprehensive. I was thirty; fairly well equipped with a public school education and some ten years' experience of city and commercial life as seen from the angle of a secretary and a clerk.

I had health and average good looks, and was unencumbered by family responsibility. The world of my choosing was still at my feet, and the ball was in play.

I left my suitcases in the station cloakroom while I sought for comfortable and cheap lodgings. With the guidance of the newspapers I inspected many alleged "homes from home" but found none to my own definition.

I had no delusions about boarding-house life and customs, but never before had I encountered an atmosphere so unattractive and depressing. As a consequence, when night came I was still unsettled.

After I had eaten at a cafe I fell

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idly into place in the street throng. The night was clear and the air warm, and a green mill turned slowly against a background of soft sky. Tempted by the quiet of the Alexandra Gardens I followed a white winding pathway to a seat under a small tree thicket, stretched my tired legs and lit my pipe.

I was congratulating myself on being so comfortable when the figure of a man appeared precipitately from a side path. At its junction with the main path he halted and looked eagerly from side to side. Seeing the glow of my pipe, as I suppose, he came rapidly towards me.

He was bareheaded, and his face glimmered oddly in the half light as he paused and peered directly at me.

He said in a pleasant but distinctly agitated voice:

"I beg your pardon. I am in search of a friend. You haven't, by any chance, seen hereabouts an elderly man wearing a dark overcoat and soft felt hat, and carrying a stick and bundle of papers? He walks very slowly and leans rather noticeably on his stick."

I said:

"No, I'm sorry I haven't. You're the first I've seen for nearly ten minutes. No one answering to that description has passed me."

HE SAT on the other end of the seat and lit a cigarette. In the brief spurt of matchlight I saw that he was young—about my own age, or a year or two less. He was smartly dressed, and had the air of a man who is considerably perturbed.

He said, as if thinking aloud:

"Perhaps, after all, I'm acting foolishly. He may be unharmed."

"Were you fearing his harm?" I asked.

"Yes and no. I wish—" He appeared suddenly to recollect that he was talking to a stranger, and stood up and stared at me. Possibly my voice reassured him, for he continued, as if glad of an opportunity to confide in someone:

"His heart is weak. He has to take certain specially ordered medicines. But I was not particularly alluding to that. I—"

The tread of heavy feet brought our heads around simultaneously. My companion exclaimed in a relieved tone: "Here's officer Crampton, one of the park police."

For a second I was blinded by the glare of an electric torch. A voice said: "Who's this? Oh, how are you, Mr. Framling? Anything wrong?"

"Not exactly wrong," Framling replied. I could feel him glance at me doubtfully. "The fact is, I'm looking for Mr. Stephen Gregory. You know him, Crampton, I think. He's director of the Bureau of Chemical Science."

"Is that all your trouble? Yes, I know Mr. Gregory well. I passed him not fifty yards back, coming this way Here he is now."

Framling muttered something which sounded suspiciously like "Thank Heaven." He went to meet the newcomer, leaving Crampton to say to me: "A friend of Mr. Framling?"

I said, "No. I just happened to be here when he came looking for this Mr. Gregory. I suppose you wouldn't object to telling me who Mr. Framling is? He seems a good chap."

So, for that matter, was the park policeman. He told me that George Framling was private secretary to the premier, Mr. Morgan Hannaford, and was considered a very able young fellow and a very likable one. He was the premier's right-hand man in a semi-official sense.

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Framling returned to the seat with his Mr. Gregory. The director of the Science Bureau was a man verging on sixty, tall and spare with short iron-gray hair and beard. His voice was mild and his manner hesitating.

He appeared to move in a world of the intellect—a clever, gentle old man, undeserving of a single enemy.

My first impulse was to pass on to find another seat, leaving the three to their conversation in common. I was, however, tired out, and possession rights were clearly mine. Added to this was a frank curiosity to learn what could prompt so personable an official as George Framling to hatless, agitated search for a scientist of such peaceful persuasion.

And so it was that the horrible thing which happened took place, as it were, at the very core of my understanding.

YOUNG FRAMLING was saying, as they seated themselves: "Why of course not, Mr. Gregory. I said as much to the premier this evening, but he was unusually nervous. Not at all like himself.

"Another of those letters came by the afternoon mail, you see. I was for treating it as a joke, but Mr. Hannaford became very serious. He asked me, in view of the facts of your particular investigation to—well, in short, to keep a bit of an eye on you."

"Toad," said Mr. Gregory, in a quiet, cultured voice, "is sinister and ill-sounding. Perhaps that, Mr. Framling, coupled with the nature of these communications, explains the psychology of the premier's unease. I might say that this morning I received a letter myself."

"You did!" Framling exclaimed—incredulously, I thought. "A letter with that signature, Mr. Gregory?"

"My dear boy," said the old gentleman—and I saw his thin hand go out to touch Framling's arm in a gesture that was singularly sweet—"my dear Framling, at my age such ill-conditioned threats have small power to terrify.

"Why, yes; Toad, as he styles himself, is evidently aware of my small entry into his affairs. Indeed, I fancy he is under a name less ugly—among my personal acquaintances. There is nothing strange in that.

"Our giants of chemistry are not so many that one should escape me. It is possible that I have unwittingly revealed to the man himself the mission entrusted to me by the premier, to endeavor to discover the identity of this man—Toad."

"He threatens you, then?"

"He definitely gives me until midnight tonight to make an end of living. Although, to be sure, I had forgotten all about it until now. A crank, Framling, if there ever was one."

"The letter received by Mr. Hannaford late this afternoon threatened you in exactly similar terms," Framling said. "Nothing would satisfy him but that I should find you and take you to his office. Knowing your habit of walking near the pond at this hour, I came immediately in search of you. The premier's impatience would not allow me even to find my hat. I have a taxi waiting on the avenue."

"What is the time?" Mr. Gregory asked.

The park policeman, Crampton, who was about to stroll on, turned his torchlight on the watch in Framling's hand.

"A quarter to eight."

"So late?" the old gentleman said with mild concern. "I am behind with my medicine, Framling. Crampton, would you have the goodness to give

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me a little more light? Thank you."

Framling said, plainly amused by this meticulous adherence to time-table treatment: "How has your heart been, Mr. Gregory? You still carry with you each exact dose in a phial, I see."

"Otherwise I am sure I should forget to take my medicine at all." Mr. Gregory smiled.

He raised the tiny glass bottle to his lips and swallowed the amber contents at a gulp.

I CANNOT—no, I simply cannot find words to describe the incredible sequel. It seemed to me that even with the act of swallowing, the old man—as if yielding to a sudden, swift, spontaneous combustion—burst into flame. A spurt of jade-green fire came from his mouth, lighting for one horrific second the enormous astonishment and fear that distended the pupils of his eyes.

His nostrils seemed to crackle. He fell gently forward, like a wax candle bending to the heat, with the ghastly flame sucked downward into his body, and toppled over on his face.

If the awfulness had stopped at that our sanity had been shocked enough. Yet we three, standing paralyzed, saw worse—infinitely, unbelievably worse.

For as he lay, there came again from every cell of flesh and blood and bone, little creeping tendrils of that jade-green flame, as if his body were soaked with fire—came and vanished. And there was no body. . . .

There was nothing but a thin green mist that might have been smoke, but that was shining and heat-laden and evilly stinking, like a breath from Hell.

Crampton's voice said at my ear: "Quick! Catch him!"

Though I was half fainting myself, Framling's utter collapse came as a needed spur. Between us we got him to a grass border, where he lay quivering.

Crampton said, like a man distraught: "Great God! I must be mad. Nothing like that ever happened . . . ever could happen. . . . "

He left me at that and went away a little, and I seemed to hear him being violently ill. He was a big man, middle-aged and powerful, but when he returned he was sagging like jelly. He picked up his torch from the gravel path, where it had fallen in the stress of his emotion, and walked to where Mr. Gregory had been.

The green haze, or whatever it was, had gone. The gravel thereabouts—as I saw for myself next day—seemed slightly darker in shade than the rest; but that was all. There remained of Mr. Gregory nothing but the walking stick which he had rested against the seat when he stood up to drink.

MY OWN sickness had passed. I carried water in my hat from a nearby tap, and with this aid quickly revived Framling. But for some seconds after he was conscious, his look was vacant.

He said presently, catching at his throat: "Crampton . . . Where's Crampton? Look here. Did that really happen to Mr. Gregory, or was it some shocking nightmare of illness?"

"It . . . happened, Mr. Framling," Crampton said.

Framling sat a moment with his face buried in his hands. I could hear the breath whistling in is lungs. But in a little while he became composed. He turned to me and asked: "What is your name?"

I told him.

"Well, Mr. Murchison," he said, "I needn't tell you, I suppose, how urgently necessary it is that not one

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word of this ghastly business should reach the public ear. It might do incalculable harm. I can rely on your word of honor?"

"Of course," I said. "What do you mean to do, Mr. Framling?"

For a moment or two he said nothing. He looked at Crampton, who was taking little short strides up and down the path, like a man bereft.

"I must see the premier. I shall probably be accused of insanity, or worse. After all, there's that possibility for all of us. We may be insane . . . "

I said: "No, Mr. Framling, we're not insane. What we saw was insane, but we three are sane enough."

"Well," said Framling, "this won't do. There's no telling how the premier will take this news. Look here, in case your added testimony is needed, what's your address?"

I told him how I stood.

He said: "You seem a good sort. And I'm awfully obliged for the way you've stood to Crampton and me. I can put you in the way of decent lodgings, I think. My wife has a girl friend who lets a few rooms by way of keeping the wolf from the door. I happen to know that a room became vacant yesterday. If you'd like to try there . . . "

It sounded just what I wanted and I said so gratefully.

"I'll give you this little note, then," Framling said, scribbling a few lines on the back of an envelope. "Her name is Nancy Carlisle, and the address is Monray Street, East Melbourne.

"By the way, in case you're suited, I ought to tell you, perhaps, that her father is something of a crank. Mona —that's my wife—says it's a case of religious mania. But he's not objectionable, they say. Anyhow, you'll like Nancy. She's a first-rate girl.

"And, mind—not a word to any one about poor old Gregory. Good Lord! I can't bring myself to believe it, even now."

Crampton came up then. He said: "I suppose you'll want me to go with you to the premier, Mr. Framling?"

"Yes," Framling said. "Murchison, we can give you a lift as far as the Treasury. Monray street is not five minutes away from the Government offices, as a matter of fact."

I said goodbye at the foot of the Treasury steps, and set out for Monray Street and Miss Nancy Carlisle. My head was in a whirl. It seemed to me that even now the real significance of everything had somehow escaped us, and that a vaster horror was to come.

CHAPTER II

THE CURIOUS CARLISLES

I FOUND the house without difficulty. It formed part of a stone terrace which had obviously fallen on evil times.

The brick steps, up which one climbed to a narrow porch, were crumbling and moss-grown. An attenuated wooden veranda ran the length of the entire second story, after the manner of a long, acrobatic earthworm.

Number 5 was exactly midway along the terrace. As I pushed open the creaking iron gate I saw that an attempt at a garden graced the meager frontage. There were a number of abbreviated kerosene tins containing geraniums, and a nasturtium grew at the foot of the steps. There was also a solitary rose bush at the center of a patch of grass.

Search discovered no bell of any kind, but an old-style knocker was on the door, and this I made use of to

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invoke from within a series of low, hollow echoes. The last had barely died when the door opened to the light of a narrow hallway, with a staircase climbing at its end.

The walls were covered with a gloomy-tinted surface very shining and clean. In places, the plaster had broken away, and the paint-work was old and shabby.

These impressions were not all gained at the time; they came later in the evening, when I made a second entry with my suitcases from the railway cloakrooms. For the moment I was fully occupied in admiration of the girl confronting me.

Nancy Carlisle was then—as she confessed some weeks later—within a week of her twenty-fifth birthday. She was of medium height and inclining to plumpness. In the exact sense of the word she was not pretty; her features were too irregular, perhaps.

It was the animation in her face and the musical timbre of her voice that first captured my imagination. These imbued her with a charm far beyond the ordered sightliness of mere good looks.

Her eyes were a mellow brown, very wide and frank. Her hair was brown and disposed about her shapely head in a wind-blown bob.

Having read Framling's introductory scrawl, she gave me a friendly smile.

"Yes, Mr. Murchison, the room is still vacant. I shall be glad to let you have it, if you find it suitable. I will show it to you."

It proved to be large and airy, with just the right amount of furniture—all spotlessly clean. There was one large window of the ordinary type, and a double-door window which gave access to the balcony. From this a fine view was had of the Fitzroy Gardens, now softly dotted with lights.

I said, "This is exactly what I hoped for, Miss Carlisle—if it is not too expensive."

"With breakfast, Mr. Murchison, I have been charging thirty shillings a week." Her tone was a little anxious, I thought, as if she feared I might think her gasping. "And of course you would have the use of the sitting room downstairs. Mr. Mertz was always comfortable here, I think."

I gathered that she referred to my predecessor. Certainly he had every opportunity of being comfortable, and I said so.

"That will suit me admirably, Miss Carlisle. Was Mr. Mertz with you for any length of time?"

"Nearly three years," she said. She added impulsively: "And yet, do you know, I could hardly describe to you what he looked like. Isn't that curious? In all that time I don't believe I ever met him, as we say, face to face. I always placed his breakfast on a tray outside his door, and knocked and went away.

"He left the house very early each morning—even on Sundays—and usually returned late at night. He had no visitors, unless you might count Father as one. Father often came here to Mr. Mertz's room, and they would talk for hours. Father liked Mr. Mertz."

"But you did not?" I asked, at a venture, attracted by some queer quality in her look.

"No," she said frankly, "I did not. Indeed, I think I very much disliked him. And yet he never once openly offended me. I can hardly explain it. But I was glad when he left us. I haven't even bothered to find out where he went.

"But I think father knows. I think

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father went to see Mr. Mertz tonight, in fact. After all, Mr. Murchison, why shouldn't he? He is a lonely man himself, and I am glad that he has at least one person that he takes pleasure in."

I WAS shown the sitting room down stairs. It, too, was plainly but comfortably furnished. There was a piano in an alcove by the fireplace, and a large bookcase stood by one wall.

There was another boarder besides me, I learned. This was a Miss Mollie Hollidew, a young lady who graced the chorus in a musical comedy when opportunity came. For the time being she was one of the ensemble of *The Kewpie Girl,* which was drawing crowded houses at the Theatre Royal.

"Mollie is quite a dear," Nancy Carlisle said, "except for what she calls her temperament, but what I call plain bad temper. It worries Cuthbert frightfully."

I said: "Who is Cuthbert?"

Nancy smiled.

"Cuthbert is—well, it is rather hard to describe Cuthbert. His other name, by the way, is Weinseidle. Cuthbert Weinseidle. It's an astonishing name, isn't it, Mr. Murchison? He's devoted to Mollie. He fetches her from the theater in his car regularly every night. It's really quite pathetic.

"He has no conversation; absolutely none. He just sits in front of Mollie, and stares at her mournfully. He reminds me sometimes of one of these china poodles. And he often irritates Mollie to the verge of madness."

"He wants her to marry him?"

"He proposes every night, I think."

Nancy burst into musical laughter. "Really it's too absurd. She won't say yes or no to the poor soul. She might do a great deal worse than Cuthbert. He has plenty of money—inherited, of course. And if he is not over-blessed with intelligence, he is a very good-hearted, decent boy. I like him."

When I returned from the railway cloakrooms with my suitcases, a handsome car was drawn up at the curb; and I judged that Mr. Cuthbert Weinseidle had performed his nightly task according to established custom, and was even then mournfully regarding the tired object of his affections.

In witness whereof, Nancy Carlisle met me, as I entered the hall, with an invitation to join them in the sitting room.

"Father has gone to bed," she said, "but Mollie and Cuthbert are inside. You're just in time for some supper, Mr. Murchison."

Mollie Hollidew welcomed the introduction with a sleepy but entirely friendly smile. She was a solid-looking brunette with a shingled, glossy head, and a much-carmined complexion. Her manner was a little affected, but underneath it I seemed to sense a sound heart.

She said as we shook hands: "You'll excuse me not rising, Mr. Murchison, won't you? As I tell Nancy, art is so exacting. Of course, you've been to see *The Kewpie Girl?*"

"Mr. Murchison arrived from Sydney only today," Nancy explained. "Mr. Weinseidle . . . Mr. Murchison."

His hand lay in mine like a lifeless herring.

Mr. Weinseidle's eye, I thought, was a little glassy. It rested on me briefly, and returned to Miss Hollidew.

He said: "Undoubtedly."

There didn't seem to be much sense in this, but as I was to discover later, "undoubtedly" was one of Cuthbert's stock remarks. He only had two. The other was "sure." As Nancy had said, he had no conversation.

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MISS HOLLIDEW, I was now informed, had had a tiff with the stage manager. She alluded to him scornfully as "that little runt," and said it was no wonder that three wives had divorced him. The only thing she couldn't understand was how he had escaped being poisoned.

While she enlarged on her text I studied Cuthbert. He was plainly much younger than Miss Hollidew; somewhere, I thought, about twenty-five or twenty-six. He had a long face and a short upper lip; his hair was fair and highly polished, and he wore sideburns and a small moustache.

Upon the whole, he seemed a little improved upon his kind. And without doubt the effect upon him of Miss Hollidew's charms was tremendous. His gaze never swerved from her, even when she made excited reference to the fact that he had made no attempt to destroy the stage manager in return for insulting reference to a lady.

"Restraint is the wiser course," Nancy said tactfully. "The manager is probably still remembering Cuthbert's look of contempt. You did look at him, didn't you, Cuthbert?"

Cuthbert said: "Undoubtedly."

"There . . . you see, Mollie," Nancy said.

"Well, perhaps, after all, it was best," Miss Hollidew conceded, with a yawn. "What's the use of arguing with a beastly little germ like Swiggins, anyhow? Give me a cigarette."

I thought this a good time to depart. I had only just realized how appallingly tired I was. The long journey by train, coupled with the incredible events of the evening, had shaken my nerves badly. Thought of Mr. Gregory was like a great black cloud at the back of my mind. I was suddenly chilled and dispirited.

Very likely something of this showed in my face, for Nancy Carlisle said as I stood up: "You look weary, Mr. Murchison. It was selfish of me to keep you up like this. I do hope you will find your bed comfortable."

I liked the warm, anxious way she smiled at me. Framling had been right when he said that she was a fine girl. It was extraordinary how homelike and contented a feeling she had given me. I think at that moment, apart from the incubus of my thought of Mr. Gregory, I was happier than I had ever been in my life.

In parting from Cuthbert I said: "I hope we shall meet again soon, Mr. Weinseidle."

I expected him to say, "Undoubtedly." Instead, he said, "Sure." His eyes never left Miss Hollidew, but I knew somehow that this resorting to the other half of his vocabulary was intended to express gratitude and liking.

Sleep came tardily. I am, as a rule, a good sleeper, but the poison of my first experience of Toad ran riot in my mind. I tried to tell myself that the thing had never happened, that it was a figment of morbid imagination, but failed sensibly to do so.

In the end, I gathered my thoughts about Nancy Carlisle—something I was to do often, very often, in the days to come. It was an anodyne which has never once failed me.

I BREAKFASTED in the sitting room about nine o'clock next morning. There was, so far, no appearance of Nancy's father, and Miss Hollidew was in the habit of keeping to her bed—unless she was rehearsing—until after midday, so that Nancy and I were the sole company during the meal.

When it was over I went out for a walk. I ought, I suppose, to have bent

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all my energies toward securing some manner of occupation, for it was plain that my small capital must soon be at an end.

But I was queerly disinclined. I idled in the gardens for the entire morning and did not return to Excelsior Terrace until after lunch time.

Someone was playing the piano in the sitting room: a hymn tune. And presently there came the sound of a man's voice singing in tones that were muffled harshly.

As I entered the hall the singing ceased, and the voice entered upon a kind of undertoned recitative, like a litany. The door of the sitting room was half open, prompting my curiosity. It was presently viewing the rounded shoulders of a man who knelt at the piano stool as if it were some sort of altar.

He was chanting monotonously, yet the words held the leaven of a strange fervor. I could make nothing of what he was saying. It sounded to me like a hodgepodge of Biblical quotations.

"For what saith the Scriptures. . . . Behold, I am come to send fire on the earth . . . neither shall there be any more a flood to destroy the earth . . . water and fire . . . and the two shall be one, and one shall be made two . . . woe unto this wicked generation for the end of all things is at hand . . ."

My elbow was touched gently. I turned, a little shamefaced, to see Nancy Carlisle at my side. It seemed to me that her brown eyes were full of tears.

But before either of us could speak the old man at the piano made an end of his mumbling and rose to his feet facing us. He was tall and thin, with a straggling gray beard, and eyes that burned somberly from the shadow of his prominent brows.

Nancy said: "Father, this is Mr. Murchison. He has taken the room that Mr. Mertz used to have."

I doubt that the old man understood her. He lifted a thin hand to his forehead and said, in a high, shaking voice: "A new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

She went to him and slipped her hand quietly into the crook of his arm.

THE soft appeal appeared to rouse his scattered wits. The fire left his eyes and his body ceased its trembling. Sanity returned to his voice.

"Yes, Nancy?"

"This is Mr. Murchison, father. He is taking Mr. Mertz's old room."

I said: "I am glad to meet you, Mr. Carlisle."

It was remarkable how changed he was in those few seconds. From a fierce-visaged fanatic he was become a timid, bewildered old man. He gave me his hand doubtfully.

"I trust you are comfortable with us, Mr. Murchison. Our ways are simple, but our friends find us sincere."

I said I was sure of that. The situation was not without pathos, and I was glad presently to escape to my own room. I found an old cane arm-chair on the balcony; sat down and lit my pipe; and fell to musing over the strange person I had just met.

It was later, of course, that I learned the history of Rufus Carlisle. He had been a prominent figure some years before in the commercial life of the city. He was an ardent church worker and among the foremost in charitable enterprise.

As very often happens, however, in men untried by any grave crisis until fairly late in life, his philosophy was without solid foundation when reverses attacked it.

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Unlucky speculation was followed by the death of his wife; and the weakness latent in Rufus Carlisle suddenly manifested itself in a fierce insobriety. He became a notorious drunkard and a man about town. His business was neglected and eventually collapsed; and he himself emerged from delirium tremens to remain for some weeks an inmate of a mental hospital.

On his discharge a strange reaction took place. He forswore utterly those practices which had reduced him to human wreckage, and entered a phase of religious mania. This was for the most part unobtrusive.

In general, the old man fell into a formula of daily existence which never varied in essentials. He rose from his bed punctually each day at ten o'clock, and at eleven o'clock began the conduct of an hour's devotional exercise in the sitting room. He then dined.

From two o'clock to five each afternoon, unless prevented by rough weather, he was to be found upon a certain seat in the Fitzroy Gardens, reading a much-thumbed Bible and meditating vacantly. At six o'clock he had his tea.

The evenings alone were free of settled conduct. Sometimes he retired early; more often he was absent until a late hour.

Nancy, I discovered, never questioned her father's actions. She gave him a solicitude which was more maternal than daughterly, attending to his wants as to those of a small, irresponsible boy. She saw that he was properly garbed before he left the house, and that in the right-hand pocket of his overcoat were always a shilling and a small paper bag containing tobacco and matches.

The old man accepted this regular attention mechanically. I think, indeed, he moved mostly in a world of his own, without proper consciousness of mundane existence.

For all that, I surprised now and then a furtive look in his eyes which suggested that his mind was not so wholly clouded, but held very definitely some purpose of this world.

CHAPTER III

WHO FOR EXTINCTION?

I HAD finished my pipe and was considering what now to do, when a tap came at the door of my bedroom. Nancy Carlisle's voice called: "Are you there, Mr. Murchison? Here's a visitor for you."

It was George Framling. I don't know that I was surprised to see him, for all day the impression had been with me that there was much more to come of the tragic circumstances of Mr. Gregory's annihilation.

In daylight Framling proved to be dark-complexioned and very good-looking. His eyes were alert and clever, and he had a firm mouth and chin. If he was worried at all he concealed the fact cleverly, for he stood smiling and joking very naturally until Nancy withdrew and we were left alone.

But I knew then that his jollity was assumed. His smile left him like the dropping of a mask, and his hands seemed unsteady as he lit a cigarette.

He said: "Can we be overheard here, Murchison?"

"I don't think so," I replied.

And then, I suppose, the terrific occasion of our last meeting returned with a rush, for I heard myself stammering: "Good Lord! Then it was true! Do you know, I had half a belief until now that I'd dreamed the whole beastly thing."

"It's no dream," Framling said

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shortly. "In fact, Murchison, no nightmare could approach the reality. I came to take you to the Treasury buildings. Mr. Hannaford and one or two others are waiting for us."

"Mr. Hannaford?"

"The premier. This thing is horribly serious, Murchison. I've never seen him so grave. I don't know whether he guesses what lies behind it all, but I do know that for the time being he is putting aside all considerations of an ordinary nature. By the way, you've kept your own counsel?"

"Yes," I said.

"Continue to do so," Framling said simply. "Now, if you'll get your hat . . ."

We left the house in silence.

FIVE men awaited us in the premier's room in the State Government offices. First, Mr. Morgan Hannaford himself—short and stout, with close-cropped gray hair and mustache, rather plethoric cheeks falling to a stern, square jaw, and somber gray eyes.

When we entered he was seated at a table, talking earnestly to a thin, angular man with keen, clever features, who was presently made known to me as Professor Branden, of the Faculty of Chemical Science at the Melbourne University.

Close by stood a middle-aged, powerfully built man, with a large nose and mouth and an almost bald head. This was Sir Hector Corrilees, chief commissioner of police.

The fourth man I immediately recognized as Senior-Detective Ralph Hermann. Hermann's rugged, farmer-like face had of late figured frequently in the photographic columns of the daily press. He held a remarkably able record in the annals of crime detection, and had only then barely concluded a particularly brilliant coup. He was high in the confidence of his chiefs and was understood to possess initiative and determination.

I saw him now as a thickset man of average height, slow moving and slow speaking. His eyes were mild, but a fearless confidence seemed to inspire his every word.

The remaining man was Crampton, the park policeman.

"Your name, I understand, is Murchison?" Mr. Hannaford said, as I came forward.

"Maurice Murchison," I told them. "I arrived from Sydney yesterday."

"Will you kindly tell us, Mr. Murchison, what you know of last night's extraordinary happening?"

I did so briefly. It was evident when I had concluded that their gravity deepened. Until that moment I really think they had cherished an improbable hope that Framling and the park policeman were victims of an extensive delusion. My corroborating testimony left them utterly at a loss.

The premier frowned and looked at Professor Branden.

"Have you any theory, Professor? Does science know of a chemical capable of such a shockingly complete annihilative action?"

"To my knowledge it does not," Branden said emphatically. His eyes were frankly bewildered. "Here is something which appears to have ignited, as it were, the entire juices of the body. I can describe it in no other way. And artificially induced an instantaneous bodily combustion . . . Mr. Hannaford, sanity finds no answer."

Detective Hermann asked abruptly: "A green flame, you said, Mr. Murchison? What kind of a green flame?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Just an ordinary green flame."

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"It seems to me," Framling interposed, "that the green was edged with orange."

"It scarcely matters," the premier said. "Mr. Murchison, I need scarcely ask if you realise the profound significance of what has happened and the vital necessity for secrecy. You can imagine the public alarm were the facts known at large. The facts must not be known. You will give me your word of honor, I hope, that so far as you are concerned no word of it passes your lips outside the present company."

"You have it," I promised. "I should like to know, however, how you propose to conceal the fact of Mr. Gregory's disappearance."

Mr. Hannaford smiled grimly.

"We don't propose to conceal it. Mr. Gregory was known to be suffering from an affected heart. Under the circumstances, his sudden death will occasion no surprise. The press has been notified already; and this evening you will read that at a late hour last night Mr. Gregory collapsed in his rooms and died at once. His funeral will take place tomorrow morning."

"His funeral!" I could not avoid exclaiming.

Sir Hector Corrilees said, apparently impatient at my dullness: "Exactly, Mr. Murchison. When a man dies he is usually provided with a funeral, is he not? In this case the public will be none the worse off for showing reverence for an empty coffin. Better that than the truth."

"THE truth," the premier said, "remains with ourselves alone. Now, Mr. Murchison, one other thing. Framling tells me that you are at present without employment. I propose, with your consent, to appoint you as assistant to Framling. You will be paid a salary and will be, to all intents and purposes, a clerk in my department.

"Actually, your duties will be to act, as you may be directed, toward an elucidation now to be undertaken by us seven men of the mystery surrounding the death of Mr. Gregory. Are you agreeable?"

It was a subtle command rather than a request, and as such I recognized it. In any case, I was willing enough. Here was work to my hand, and of a caliber to excite my utmost interest.

"I am quite willing," I assured him.

"The rest of us are sworn to secrecy," the premier continued gravely, "and you will be good enough, Mr. Murchison, to take the oath in turn, and put your signature to this declaration. Possibly this procedure strikes you as extraordinary. I may go so far, indeed, as to say that not only are the circumstances themselves extraordinary; they mark a crisis of unexampled danger."

When I had taken the oath the tension seemed to relax a little.

"And now, Mr. Murchison," Mr. Hannaford said, "it is necessary you should know something of what we fear. The crime of which you were a witness last night is undoubtedly that of a man who styles himself Toad.

"Toad is, I should say, a criminal lunatic with the brain of a genius. His identity is wholly unknown to us, although Professor Branden has fortunately been able to provide us with a tiny clue. He has recalled that some years ago, when he was a student, a classmate at the chemistry sessions bore the nickname of Toad. I undertand, Professor, that you have been unable to trace this man's proper name?"

"Unfortunately, that is so," Professor Branden said. "The time which has elapsed—it must be, I suppose, close on

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thirty years—has dimmed everything. I can only recollect that he was a man of very repulsive features, but exceedingly clever, and with almost a mania for research work.

"Poor Gregory was also in my year, and it was he who revived my impressions of the fellow only yesterday. He was called Toad, I believe, because someone had noticed that the iris of his eyes was of a peculiar reddish hue. The toad, as perhaps you are aware, Mr. Murchison, has a flame-colored iris.

"Toad had also a face which, as I remember it, was globular and puffy—another characteristic of the reptile whose name he vaingloriously affected. I say 'vaingloriously' because he was a man of enormous vanity. So far from being resentful of the ugly appellation, he took it as a compliment.

"Apart from this fact of his appearance, he was of a spiteful, poisonous disposition. If Toad of our present problem, Mr. Hannaford, is Toad as known to Gregory and me, we are confronted with a man who is both wicked and clever to a degree."

FRAMLING said in a low voice: "Mr. Gregory spoke of him as a giant of chemistry. You remember that, perhaps, Murchison?"

"Yes," I said. "I had an impression that Mr. Gregory was pretty close to knowing who he was."

"I believe that," Professor Branden said. His manner for a second or two was agitated. "It was that knowledge—or, I should say, impending knowledge—which destroyed him. By some means this man knew of it. It became imperative, apparently, that Gregory should be silenced.

"That, of course, is a danger which now confronts every one of us in this room. I scarcely think, however, that similar means will be employed. Chance probably aided in Gregory's case. And there would always be the risk that the chemical employed—if it is a chemical—might be discovered and its foul nature revealed."

Sir Hector Corrilees looked at his fuming cigar. He said: "What steps do you advise, Hermann?"

"The identity of Toad is my first concern," the detective said slowly. "There are two lines of approach. First, what Professor Branden has told us; second, the man's handwriting, assuming that it is his handwriting. Framling, you might let Mr. Murchison see those communications. The first of the story lies there."

"And you, Branden?"

"For my part," the professor said, as Framling handed to me a little sheaf of papers, "I have taken a sample of the gravel where poor Gregory fell. I intend to subject it to an exhaustive analysis."

I gave my attention, then, to Framling and the letters. There were six of these, the first being dated some four months back. All were in a crabbed handwriting very difficult to decipher, but the envelopes in each case were neatly typed and addressed uniformly: *The State Premier, Treasury Buildings, Melbourne.*

Framling said: "The writing is atrocious, isn't it? You will note that each letter bears a separate country district postmark. An ordinary precaution, of course, on the part of the writer."

The first letter was as follows:

The Premier, Mr. Morgan Hannaford . . . I require the sum of £100,000, failing which I shall make myself unpleasantly known to the Government and country. Reply in the Missing Friends columns of the daily press.
Toad.

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"A touch of satire there," Framling murmured at my elbow. "We took no notice, naturally. Those in office are inundated with crank communications. A fortnight later this one arrived."

The second was couched more peremptorily:

I now require £200,000. Delay, Mr. Hannaford, will prove costly. See to it.
Toad.

There were two more letters in similar vein. Then came this:

My patience is not inexhaustible. I am fully able to enforce my demands by means of which you little dream. My terms are now £500,000, and unless reply is forthcoming within one week I shall endeavor to prove to you my entire seriousness.
Toad.

"In the meantime," Framling explained, "we had taken steps to identify the writer, if possible. Mr. Gregory had chanced to call on the premier early in the series, and was shown the letters—more by way of a joke than anything else. He was, however, impressed by the signature.

"At his own suggestion, Mr. Gregory undertook to make inquiries. Still later, Mr. Hannaford, persuaded now that the affair was not altogether a joking matter, arranged that Hermann should take it up. The week ended the day before yesterday. Yesterday afternoon this letter came."

As I read, an ugliness seemed to leer at me from every line of the crooked writing.

On my own head be it, then, Mr. Hannaford, or rather, on the head of Mr. Stephen Gregory, whose unwarranted interference in my affairs has annoyed me for some time past. I now demand £800,000.
Toad.

"It was this letter," Framling explained, "which sent me in search of Mr. Gregory last night. Can anyone doubt the connection?"

As if in sinister reply, a knock came at the door. Framling opened it to take from a messenger a telegram addressed to Mr. Hannaford. The premier opened the envelope casually, continuing his conversation with Sir Hector Corrilees and Professor Branden.

But as his eye fell on the contents I saw his face blanch, he let the telegraph form fall from his fingers to the floor.

Professor Branden said, as he recovered the telegram: "Not bad news, I trust, Mr. Hannaford."

The premier seemed to recover his grip on himself. He gave a short laugh, and said: "Read it out, Branden, and judge for yourselves."

Branden did so, a hardness creeping into his tones as he grasped its damnable import.

Gregory gone. Who next? Think it over.
Toad.

THE silence was broken by a savage exclamation from the chief commissioner. He stood up and threw his cigar butt into the chimney grate as if he might have been hurling a bomb into the face of our common enemy, then said, harshly:

"Hermann, it's up to you. I give you carte blanche. Do exactly as you like so long as you lay this swine by the heels. Alive or dead, Hermann. Nobody will bother you with a single question."

"I'll do my best, Sir Hector," the detective said, very quietly.

A little later we quietly went our ways—to meet again as individual mourners at the mock funeral next morning of Stephen Gregory. It was curious to observe the all-unconscious solemnity of the great crowd which as-

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sembled at the graveside, and to reflect upon the astonishment and indignation which must have resulted were it known that the beautiful fostering hope of the burial service was being evoked for nothing more than a coffin full of carefully packed bricks.

I saw Detective Hermann standing on the outskirts of the assemblage, a frown on his farmer's face. When the service was over, he approached me unobtrusively and suggested that we lunch in company.

I was quite agreeable to this, for I wanted to know him more intimately. He had, as I found, an engaging personality when he chose. We chatted of many things, but of Toad there was—as if by tacit understanding—no mention. Our surroundings, indeed, precluded an exchange of confidences.

The events of that evening, apart from my own share in them, were told to me next day by Hermann. He spent the afternoon going through the class files at the University, in the hope of narrowing down the identity of Toad.

At seven o'clock, having dined in town, Hermann retired to his office at Russell Street Headquarters for, as he explained, some quiet thinking. At seven-thirty the telephone on his desk rang violently. As he lifted the receiver a man's voice, almost incoherent with emotion, greeted his ear.

He asked sharply: "Who's that? Take your time . . . easy now. What name did you say?"

"Is that you Hermann? George Framling speaking . . ."

"It's you, George . . ." Hermann confessed that he had a premonition of evil as he caught the name. "Anything wrong?"

Framling said in a choking voice: "Hermann . . . Mona . . ."

"Your wife!" Hermann exclaimed.

A sound came, like a sob.

"She's gone," Framling said. "She's disappeared . . ."

CHAPTER IV

CHINAMAN'S CHANCE

ON THE evening of Mr. Gregory's funeral I was bold enough to suggest to Nancy Carlisle that we go to a theater.

She said, without the least trace of coquetry or affectation: "It's awfully kind of you to ask me, Mr. Murchison, and I appreciate it. Father is out and won't be home until late. Friday is his greatest extravagance. And today is Friday."

"He spends the day with old friends?" I suggested.

"I don't know," she replied. For a moment her brown eyes looked troubled, but presently she was smiling again.

"Honestly, Mr. Murchison, I don't know where he goes or what he does. Poor old dear, if he likes to ramble around, why not? Can we go to see *The Kewpie Girl* do you think?"

I said: "*The Kewpie Girl* is the very place for us."

Nancy went to get tea ready, and I went to my room and hunted up my best necktie. Even Toad, I found, was not proof against a pair of soft brown eyes and a voice like a flute. The creature vanished completely from my mind.

We decided to walk to the theater. We went through the gardens into Spring Street, and thence to the top of Bourke Street. We had just turned the corner when Nancy exclaimed:

"There's Cuthbert. I suppose he's just driven Mollie to the theater, and now doesn't know what to do with himself."

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A car was standing at the curb, and I made out the lugubrious features of Mr. Weinseidle peering at us from the window of the driver's seat. A cigarette drooped from under one corner of his incipient mustache.

"Why, whatever are you doing here?" Nancy said, as we halted. "Have you dropped Mollie in at her dressing rooms, or are you waiting for her now?"

Cuthbert said: "Undoubtedly."

But immediately afterward it appeared that this sounded quite as futile in his own ears as in ours, for he added, with an obviously tremendous effort: "She's at the theater. I'm just hanging about. Nothing to do."

"Why don't you go home for an hour or two?" Nancy asked gently.

Cuthbert found no reply to this. He shifted his cigarette to the opposite corner of his mustache and just stared at us.

"Well," Nancy said, "we must be going or we shall be late for the theater. Mr. Murchison is taking me to see Mollie in *The Kewpie Girl*. Goodbye, Cuthbert."

"WAIT a moment," I said. I was almost certain that I saw an unusual effort of speech dawning in Mr. Weinseidle's eye. "I think he wants to tell us something."

"Undoubtedly," Cuthbert said. He seemed to gather his vocabulary about him as if it were a cloak, and his cheeks grew pink with a rush of words. "Funny thing, I thought I saw Mona Framling a little while back. Nearly stopped and said how-de-do, only I knew it wasn't Mona."

Something prompted Nancy to say: "How do you know it wasn't Mona? Didn't you see her face?"

"Sure. But it wasn't Mona. What would Mona be doing going into a Chinese joint at this hour, with a Chinese companion? Am I right? Undoubtedly."

This effort left him almost panting. But Nancy almost flew at him.

"Cuthbert, are you positive it wasn't Mona? You know her so well. How could you be mistaken?"

I could see Cuthbert mentally testing out both "undoubtedly" and "sure" and deciding that, for once, neither would do. What he eventually said was: "I could have sworn it was Mona, you know. Yes, it looked like Mona."

Nancy's eyes sought mine. Her face was oddly pale in the car light.

She asked: "Can you remember the place, Cuthbert? Will you take us there? I can't understand how it could be Mona, but strange things happen sometimes, even in Melbourne. I feel most uneasy."

"Hop in," Cuthbert said.

At least, if he lacked conversation, he knew how to handle a car in theater traffic. A more perfect control I have never seen. It seemed scarcely a minute before we were stepping out at the entrance of an untidy lane that reeked of decay and gave an odd impression of slinking backward into the jungle of malodorous shadows beyond. My skin suddenly tingled.

"Where are we?" Nancy asked.

"Lane off Little Frankland," Cuthbert said. He took a fresh cigarette from his case. Before lighting it he pointed it at a blowsy stone building.

"Went in there."

I said, on a sudden thought, "Mr. Weinseidle, I don't like this. Would you mind, I wonder, driving to Russell Street and seeing if you can get hold of Detective Hermann. He could telephone to Framling. If Mrs. Framling is missing, bring them both right back

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here. Miss Carlisle and I will wait."

"I was going to suggest that," Nancy said.

Cuthbert said: "Undoubtedly."

HE CLIMBED back into his seat, threw in the clutch, and was gone. We were left standing in the darkness, staring alternately at each other and at the black oblong of the doorway confronting us across the lane.

There was not a light anywhere in the building that I could see. The lane, and the street itself, were silent and deserted. And yet I experienced a queer clairvoyance of little sounds and sensations as I looked up at the one window which showed like a white, amorphous face, against the crumbling background of the night.

Nancy, I think, knew something of the same disordered emotion, for she drew near to me, and I felt her hand trembling as it slipped unashamedly into the crook of my arm.

She said, almost in a whisper: "Mr. Murchison, it's quite impossible, surely, that Mona could be in such a place. I do hope Cuthbert comes back to laugh at us."

My own thoughts were coming piecemeal, like drips from a tap. I began to feel that if I didn't become active in some way or another, I should grow panic-stricken.

"It's so unlikely that it was Mrs. Framling that I shouldn't worry yet if I were you," I said. "Suppose we have a closer look at the place, Nancy?"

The name slipped out before I thought what I was saying. But she gave no sign of disapproval. All she said was: "Of course it's absurd of Cuthbert, altogether. What a beastly looking place it is."

And then, in a quite natural voice: "Maurice, I'm so grateful that you're here with me. Fancy if I was waiting all alone: how much more horrible."

The "Maurice" so gratified me that I became momentarily embarrassed.

I said: "I've a good mind to bang on the door and fetch the people out—if there are any people. What do you think, Nancy?"

"I hate standing idle when Mona might actually be there, and in peril, perhaps," she said. "But it's so utterly improbable that we'd we wise, I think, to wait Cuthbert's return."

I thought it no harm, all the same, to try the handle of the door. To my astonishment it was not locked. I pushed it gently inward, aware of a thick, musty, orientally flavored strench rising to my nostrils out of the cave-like interior. The hall, as I supposed it to be, was in inky darkness. Not a sound was to be heard.

"Why, Maurice, it's an empty house," Nancy said. Her voice held an immense relief. "How absurd."

I said cautiously: "We can't be sure of that. Look here. I'll go inside a little way. Stay just where you are. If anything alarms you, call me instantly."

I could see that the idea did not commend itself to her very greatly, but she made no objection. All she said was: "Be careful, Maurice. Have you matches?"

I said, "Yes," and lit one forthwith. It discovered for me a kind of vestibule, with a staircase at the end. The walls were blotched and stained with damp, and the wallpaper hung in strips everywhere.

I was so certain, even upon that brief inspection, that the place was deserted and dead that I was on the point of immediate withdrawal, when I chanced to notice the floor. What I saw made me strike a second match and walk some way up the vestibule.

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Dust lay thickly upon the creaking floor boards. Clearly defined upon it were freshly made footprints, pointing toward the stairs. There were no returning prints; therefore it was obvious that whoever had entered was still in the house, unless an exit had been made from the rear.

On a sort of landing at the foot of the stairs the wall disclosed a squat doorway. This I tried, and found the door fast with bolt and padlock. By the look of it I should say it had not been used for a long time, for the greasy dust was piled high against the lintels.

My last match had burned out, and I found to my annoyance that I was now helpless against the night. I raised my eyes to the stair-landing above. I saw a thread of brightness stretched horizontally upon the thick, palpitating darkness, and knew it instantly for light escaping from beneath a door.

The unexpectedness of it sent my hand groping for the support of the bannister—with disastrous results. I had no sooner touched it than simultaneously, as it seemed, a bell whirred shrill warning overhead. It stilled as abruptly and paralyzingly as it had begun.

The thread of brightness wavered, then gave place to a tall oblong of light as the door opened. Framed in it was the squat silhouette of a man.

This, I think, was my first sight of Toad—if it was Toad. And of small satisfaction at that, for there was only this indeterminate black shadow waxing and waning against the dim light at its back.

Even the voice which now challenged me was odd—like the joining of hollow echoes into one sibilant whole.

Already I was turning the corner of the bannister into the vestibule, with the open street door beckoning like a friendly gray ghost. There was a chill at my spine and my scalp tingled. For all I knew, the next second might see the blackness behind me split by the flame of a discharging gun, and I should know the searing impact of a bullet.

I am sure that it was not the thought of a shot itself that so overcome me, but the creeping horror of the malign intelligence poised bat-like at the core of the darkness. I am not certain even now that the encounter was with Toad. I believe so, but I do not know. Of its evilness I have no doubt at all.

The challenge was not repeated, but I seemed to hear the stealthy tread of feet descending the stairs. I was halfway to the street door when two interruptions came. There was first the scream of a woman's voice, faint yet penetrating, from some recess of the darkness; then, leaping on my ears with the suddenness of an explosion, the screaming brakes of a motor car suddenly halted.

I WAS back on the footpath before the clamor died, with Nancy holding to my arms and the breath of her excitement on my face.

She said: "Maurice, was that a scream?"

As I nodded, Hermann and George Framling scrambled from the car. I said to Nancy: "Go over and stay by the car with Cuthbert."

For a second I thought she meant to dispute my sudden, unconscious assumption of authority. But whatever resentment she may have felt, she mercifully refrained from comment. She left me without a word. I was presently replying, as best I could, to Framling's distracted questioning.

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I said: "I'm certain I heard a woman call out a second ago. Nancy heard it, too. There's a man in the house, anyway."

Framling made a rush for the door, but Hermann was too quick for him. He caught him gently but firmly by the arm.

"Steady, George. If Mrs. Framling is in there we'll have her out safe and sound in a moment or two. No need to run your face into someone's fist, or worse. I know this place. It used to be occupied by Sing Wu, who called himself a herbalist. Now, Mr. Murchison, what have you discovered?"

I could see how the delay galled and fretted Framling, but there was no help for it. After all, Hermann's caution was born of experience and had ample justification. He had a measure of responsibility toward all of us there, apart from Mona Framling. As he afterward explained, the house might have held a dozen police "wanteds" for all we knew.

I recounted my experience, even to the panic which had driven me cravenly into the open.

"You were wise," Hermann said.

He released Framling's arm and took an electric torch from his pocket. He held this in his left hand; his right hand was thrust into the pocket of his coat. If I am not mistaken, it grasped the butt of an automatic. Hermann had no liking for spectacular gunplay. He fired invariably through the right-hand pocket of his coat.

The first thing that struck me on re-entry of the vestibule was the fact that the door at the foot of the stairs, which had been shut and padlocked, was now open. I said as much. Hermann pushed through it and sent the light over a narrow yard beyond.

He had barely remarked, "Empty as a fasting friar," when Framling again lost his self control. With an excited exclamation, he elbowed the detective aside and raced up the stairs. The example fired my own courage. With Hermann's voice at our backs condemning the pair of us for somethinged undisciplined fools, we arrived breathlessly at the landing.

Framling, fighting mad, did not even wait to try the handle of the now closed door. He put his shoulder to it with a grunt. The flimsy catch yielded instantly. There was a momentary jar of the door bursting inwards, and next moment we sprawled on the floor beyond.

As I rose in the light of an oil lamp set on a packing case against the far wall, I saw that the room was empty, except for the crumpled body of a woman at its center. She lay without movement, arms extended, and white face pointing at the dingy ceiling, and I heard a sob in Framling's throat as he fell on his knees at her side. For a horrible second I feared she was dead.

But even as Framling called her name agonizedly, the heavy eyelids fluttered and opened. As Hermann stamped into the room Mona Framling struggled up against her husband's arms.

"George!"

"Thank God!" Framling cried. And then, sharply. "You're not hurt?"

"I don't think so. No, of course not. I think . . . I just fainted. Has that horrible Chinaman gone?"

"There's no one here but ourselves," Framling said.

Hermann had left us. I could hear his stolid tread as he went from room to room, searching thoroughly but unavailingly. I was about to follow him, being uncomfortably awakened to a sense of intrusion, when Framling

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turned from his endearments to sudden recognition of my presence. A little confused, he got to his feet. But suddenly also came the reaction of his relief. He began to laugh . . .

He said, presently, wiping his eyes: "Murchison, old man, I beg your pardon. I quite forgot. Meet my wife."

And then, I suppose, the queer circumstances of the introduction caught us simultaneously, for all three of us joined our laughter.

Even the farmer face of Hermann, now standing in the doorway, bore a faint grin.

He said: "Well, if Mrs. Framling's ready, we'll close the party and get home."

CHAPTER V

EYES OF FIRE

CUTHBERT, now inarticulate as ever, drove us to the Framling's suburban flat. He refused, however, to leave the car.

His owlish expression was eloquent of concentration upon the subject of Miss Mollie Hollidew. Even when Hermann complimented him upon his share in the success of the evening, he only stared mournfully. He drove away finally without having uttered a single word.

The adventure had robbed Nancy and me of the theatre for that night. Consequently, when Framling suggested that we should all repair to his home for the purpose of hearing his wife's story—if she felt equal to the task of telling it then—we agreed readily.

Hermann accompanied us.

As we entered the flat he asked me: "Do you write shorthand, Mr. Murchison? You do. Then I'll get you to take notes of any account we may have from Mrs. Framling. I'll have them typed, and they can accompany my official report."

Hermann, some time after, returned my notes, thinking I might have curiosity to retain them for my own private satisfaction. The long lapse of time, as I honestly believe, has removed the bar of secrecy from the events of those troublous and terrifying days. In revealing this portion of them, I am fortunately enabled to refer to the original statement of Mona Framling.

A naturally courageous girl, she had almost wholly recovered her nerve by the time she reached her home, and was even eager to relate what had occurred. This she did slowly and thoughtfully, sitting in a comfortable armchair before the radiator in her bedroom. The night was warmish; but, as often happens where the whole system is shocked, she was chilled to the fingertips.

Nancy made some hot coffee for Mona and herself, and Framling produced for the rest of us some very decent whisky.

Mona Framling was a pretty brunette, with a pleasant voice and manner. She had, I think, the most shapely hands I have ever seen. These supplemented her voice during her narration with little odd, explanatory gestures which were very charming.

I give the story verbatim. She began nervously, but soon settled to an easy, comfortable style, encouraged, from time to time, by Framling's warm, quick smile.

"It must have been about six o'clock this evening when the phone rang. I had everything ready for George's tea, and the phone bell rather startled me. I thought I knew exactly what had happened. George was working late at the office and wouldn't be home to eat

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the nice things I'd got for him. I felt a bit annoyed.

"When I took down the receiver, however, it wasn't George at all; it was a man's voice, though. The queer thing is that the tones seemed to be familiar. I'd heard them before. It was someone I knew. And this reassured me, when I heard what he had to say. Thinking it came from a friend, I never for a moment questioned the truth of it.

"He said that George had met with an accident and had asked him to telephone and ask me to come into town to him. No, George wasn't badly hurt, and there was no need to come in a taxi. It was partly that he was ill and partly that he wanted to see me at once on particular business.

"I asked who was speaking but he passed it over. He said that he'd taken George to rest a while into a Chinese herbalist's place that happened to be handy. The name was Sing Wu, and it was in Padderman's Lane, off Little Frankland Street."

Hermann interrupted here to say: "The name is genuine enough. Sing Wu ran a herbal business there for over a year. It was really only a blind for a fan-tan school. The plainclothes men found that out and closed Wu up. That was a month ago. Wu cleared out to Bendigo, and the house has been vacant since. Yes, Mrs. Framling?"

SHE continued: "Well, of course I said I'd go. I was a good deal upset, naturally. It didn't occur to me that the obvious thing for him to do was to bring George home to me instead of asking me to trail all the way there after him. And all the time, as I said before, I seemed to know the voice. I was certain I knew the speaker.

"When I'd hung up and was dressing to go out, I began to puzzle over it. And, all at once, I thought I knew. Nancy, you remember the man that used to board with you? That funny, keep-to-myself kind of man that your father used to talk to?"

"Do you mean Mr. Mertz?"

"That's the name—Mr. Mertz. It sounded to me like Mr. Mertz. When I used to be so often in your house—before George became serious enough to want to marry me—I met Mr. Mertz once or twice. I never really saw him properly, but we used to greet each other politely in passing. His voice held a peculiar quality, and this impressed me. Besides, I nearly always remember people's voices."

"And was it Mertz?" Hermann asked.

Mona shrugged her shoulders.

"It couldn't have been, Mr. Hermann. When I got to the corner of Padderman's Lane it was dusk. There wasn't a soul in sight except a middle-aged Chinaman standing on the corner. When I started looking about me he came up to me and said: 'Are you Mrs. Framling?'

"His English was as good as my own, but that didn't surprise me. I know that lots of Chinese now are the product of our public schools. I said I was Mrs. Framling.

"He said: 'I am Dr. Sing Wu. I telephoned to you on behalf of your husband. My house is here, Mrs. Framling. I hope I have not distressed you very much. As a matter of fact, Mr. Framling has very nearly recovered.'

"I said, as we entered the house: 'What happened to Mr. Framling?'

"He replied: 'He was knocked down by a motorcycle. Fortunately no bones are broken. He is bruised and a little sick, but otherwise unhurt.'"

"Sorry to interrupt again," Hermann said. He was frowning thought-

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fully. "Did you recognize this man's voice? Of course it wasn't really Sing Wu; Wu is a little nutcracker of a Chinese, all tied in knots with rheumatism, and nearly a hundred years old by the look of him. Did you recognize his voice as that you'd heard on the phone? Was it like the voice of this other man, Mertz?"

Mona said: "Yes, it was astonishingly so. It was growing dark, and I couldn't see his face clearly. But if he wasn't a Chinaman he certainly resembled one. I don't see how it could have been Mr. Mertz."

"There is such a thing as disguise," the detective said dryly. "What happened next, Mrs. Framling?"

"WHY, the next thing was that I began to have my first doubts about the story of this man. The vestibule was quite bare and very dirty, you see. It was plainly unoccupied. I stopped, just inside the door.

"Sing Wu—I might as well call him by that name—said: 'I occupy the top floor only, Mrs. Framling. I haven't found a tenant yet for the bottom floor. Will you go upstairs?'

"Well, there was nothing else to do. If George was there it was all right enough. If he wasn't . . . But I couldn't make any sense of the business in such case. Sing Wu had never even heard of me before then, so far as I knew. Why should he go to all that trouble if things weren't as he said? I wasn't worth robbing . . .

"Anyhow, it was too late to draw back then. So up the stairs I went, with Sing Wu coming softly behind. There was a lighted lamp in the room off the top landing, and I went in, expecting to see George. When I found he wasn't there, I became really frightened.

"I said: 'Where is my husband?'

"He said, quite calmly: 'Your husband is coming, Mrs. Framling. As soon as he gets the letter you are going to write to him now, he will join you.'

"I said: 'What do you mean? Why should I write a letter to him? You told me he had met with an accident, and was here in your house, waiting for me. Well, where is he?'

"He answered: 'My dear young lady, it was necessary to deceive you a little. Mr. Framling hasn't yet met with his accident. I was a trifle previous, that's all. Now you'll take that paper and pencil on the box there, and write him a nice little note, telling him to come here at once, and to be sure not to bring anyone with him or to mention to anyone where he is going.'

"Naturally I refused to do anything of the kind. I realized that I was in some kind of a trap. I said that if he did not release me at once I would scream my head off. He didn't get angry or excited. He just smiled.

"He said, in the smooth, soft voice that he had used from the beginning: 'Scream as hard as you like, Mrs. Framling. No one will hear you. And, even if they should, no notice will be taken. In this quarter of Melbourne a woman's scream is nothing at all; just nothing at all.' "

Mona broke off a minute and buried her face in her hands. When she resumed, her voice shook a little.

"I wish I could make you understand the horrible way in which he said that. As I said, his voice was smooth and soft. Too smooth and soft. It was like some filthy fat slug crawling over my ears. The innuendo scared me properly . . . "

George Framling put his arm over her shoulders. His eyes were burning. He said: "Never mind that for a moment, darling. Try to remember now.

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Did you see Cuthbert pass in his car, just as you met this—this man?"

"No," Mona answered. "I remember seeing a car pass at the head of the lane, though . . . Where was I? Oh . . . Well, then I was terribly scared, but I said pointblank that I wouldn't write. I demanded over and over again to be set free. Sing Wu stood there smiling. His hat was off and I could see his eyes shining.

"They were dreadful eyes. They looked as if they were on fire. They were all red around the pupils . . ."

I exclaimed at this. I couldn't help it. It flashed on me all at once what Professor Branden had said about Toad having eyes with flame-colored irises. I believe that if Hermann had not suddenly kicked my ankle, I must have spoken the name out loud.

I remembered in time that the women were not to know of Toad—were never to know, if we could help it; that the name Toad must never be given to the outside world.

Nancy asked: "Why, Maurice, what's the matter?"

I said lamely: "Nothing. The description struck me as unusual, that's all. Please continue, Mrs. Framling."

"I don't want to talk any more about that," Mona said, shuddering. "The next thing that happened was that I heard a car drive up and stop just outside the house. A minute later it drove away again.

"That was Cuthbert bringing Nancy and Mr. Murchison, of course. I didn't know that. Still, I opened my mouth to yell, in the hope that someone was there to hear me. But before I could make a sound Sing Wu, or whatever the creature's real name is, held out a little bottle or flask made of silver-gray metal, and removed a stopper made from the same metal, releasing an acrid scent.

"He said, in that horrible slug's voice: 'Not a word, Mrs. Framling, please. Do you know what hydrofluoric acid is? So powerful in its action, it can only be kept in containers of platinum or beeswax. If I emptied this into your pretty face, by the time your inquisitive friends found you the flesh of your head would be eaten off to the bone. That happens the moment you call out.'

Framling was walking up and down the little room, his hands opening and shutting. Where the rest of us were starkly horrified, he was like a man out of his mind.

He kept saying: "The unutterable beast! The swine! If I get my hands on that devil . . "

"Steady, George," Hermann said.

He went to Framling and took him by the shoulders.

"That will keep, George. Don't say it."

The sharp warning recalled Framling to his senses. He drew his hand across his eyes and laughed shortly, and sat down once more. But he continued for some time to tremble like a man in an ague.

Hermann said, glancing at me: "You were remarkably brave, Mrs. Framling. Hydrofluoric acid, eh? Acrid-smelling? Well, perhaps it was hydrofluoric. What then?"

"We stayed like that, Mr. Hermann what seemed an age, just glaring at each other. Sing Wu was about to break the silence when, all at once, a bell blared on the landing just outside. It startled him badly, I could see that. He was at the door like a shot. He opened it, and I heard him call: 'Who is there?'

"There was no answer. After a mo-

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ment Sing Wu began to go down the stairs. He could only have descended half a dozen steps when, for the second time, a car pulled up in the street below. I could hear the motor racing. . . .

"I was standing listening, when Sing Wu returned. His eyes were like little flames. He had the bottle in his hand, and I saw his fingers touching the metal stopper. I screamed then at the top of my voice.

"And then, I suppose, I must have fainted at last, for the next I knew I was clutching at George . . ."

THERE was a long silence when Mona finished. Nancy had drawn close to my side. Her face was ghastly. I caught her hands in mine and held them tightly. I feared for a moment that she was about to faint herself.

Hermann said presently: "Mrs. Framling—and you, Miss Carlisle—I'm going to ask you to keep the events of this night as the strictest secret. I can't explain to you why I ask this. You must trust me that I wouldn't ask it if it weren't absolutely necessary. Will you give me your word that you will not speak of it to anyone?"

They nodded solemnly.

"I promise, too," Nancy whispered.

"Thank you," Hermann said gravely. "Suppose we all try to wipe it out of mind? We won't discuss it again, even among ourselves, eh?"

"But surely," Nancy said, "you'll bring that dreadful man to account?"

"I give you my word of honor, Miss Carlisle, that I shall move heaven and earth to find him," the detective said grimly. "I have no greater ambition in life, believing as I do. Now, Mrs. Framling, if I were you I should get to bed and to sleep.

"On no account whatever go alone again on an excursion of the kind. If anything untoward occurs let me know. Failing me, ask for Sir Hector Corrilees, the chief commissioner. I will arrange that you will be put directly into touch with Sir Hector himself.

"This applies to you also, Miss Carlisle. Do nothing except on advice. And remain at home, rather than go out at night alone."

He went away then. Shortly afterward, Nancy and I took our leave. We were both silent. It was a long time before I could get to sleep that night. My mind was haunted by Toad.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Help Kidneys Pass 3 Pints a Day

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. Kidneys remove excess acids and poisonous waste from your blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

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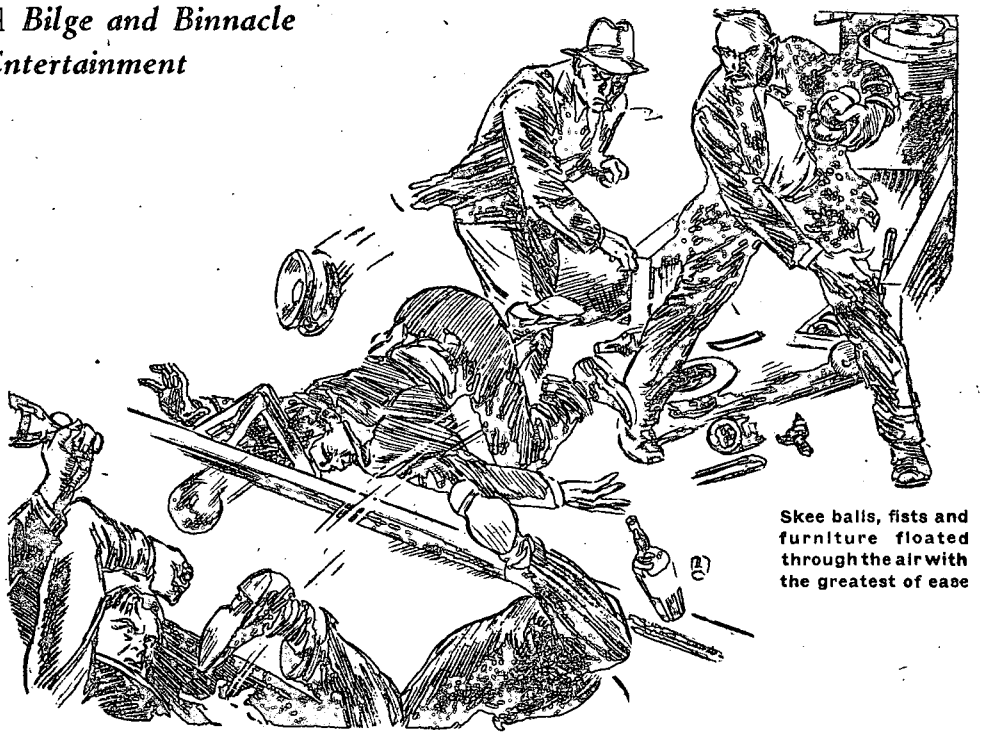
A Bilge and Binnacle Entertainment



Skee balls, fists and furniture floated through the air with the greatest of ease

Suicide Sid

Presenting the one and only Indestructible Sidney (is he man or mouse?), sponsored by those sea-going brawlers, the members of the Bilge and Binnacle Club, in a program of assault, confusion and calamity unequaled since the Flood. A riotous novelet

By CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

Author of "Even Stephen," "The Horrible Hornbills," etc.

I

IT IS a well known fact around Fort Street that Tug Raffin is a great humanitarian. Of course there are a few backbiters who will say that he is a roughneck sailor whose brains have slipped down to his fists, but even they will admit that Tug hates to see anyone suffer and usually disposes of his enemies in one punch.

Although he is a big blond moose with a face that looks as though it had been blasted out of the side of Stone Mountain, Tug Raffin owns a heart which is crammed with consideration for his fellow man. All of which leads up to the matter at hand.

On a bright September morning Tug Raffin and Rat-line Sam were coming out of Fink Hall when they saw a large crowd gathered in the street be-

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low an eleven-story office building. Old Rat-line Sam's mustaches seemed to bristle, and his eyes twinkled with interest. "Avast, lad," he said. "It looks like a accident."

Tug grabbed Rat-line Sam by the sleeve. "We'd better keep out of it," he advised.

"Blow me down!" Rat-line Sam strained forward, pointing a horny finger at the office building. "Some swab's up there on the ledge. He's gonna jump!"

Tug's face crinkled into the sun. "It does look that way," he admitted. "Why don't they stop him?"

A pedestrian seated on the curb overheard Tug's remark. "The cops are afraid to make a pass at him for fear he'll jump," stated the pedestrian. "The guy's been up there since six o'clock."

"How terrible," said Tug, greatly affected. "I can't stand here and watch—"

"You ain't draggin' me off, are ye?" Rat-line Sam's mustaches drooped disappointedly.

"No," said Tug firmly. "We must do something to help."

Instead of pushing through the crowd, they entered the building by way of an alley and climbed a back stairway to the eleventh floor. There they found Police Inspector McGivens munching a sandwich by the elevator. "You birds ain't allowed here," said the inspector harshly. "Only police, reporters and—"

Tug motioned to Rat-line Sam. "This," he said solemnly, "is the man's father."

McGivens wolfed the sandwich hurriedly. "The father, eh?"

"Aye," nodded Rat-line Sam, squeezing a tear from his left eye. "We come to take a look at the lubber—"

Tug drove his heel into Rat-line Sam's shin. "We thought we might lure him inside," he hastened. "A father's plea, you know."

"Doubt if it'll work," said McGivens, wiping his thumbs on his vest. "The guy's been thwarted in love. When that happens they usually jump."

He led them into a large corner office filled with newspapermen playing blackjack. Several photographers leaned out the window snapping pictures. Tug shoved the photographers aside and crawled over the sill.

THE cause of all this excitement was a runty individual in a baggy gray suit. His face resembled that of a guinea pig because it had a snouty, expressionless appearance and tame bewildered eyes. He was crouched on the ledge, looking morosely at the street. The ledge was good and wide, with plenty of room for him to move around on. When he saw Tug Raffin watching him, he blinked at the seaman suspiciously.

"Don't come near me, or I'll jump." His voice squeaked like a rubber doll.

"Tell me your troubles," said Tug sociably. "Are you despondent?"

"No," was the blank-faced reply. "I am Sidney Mandragon."

"Haven't you anything better to do than commit suicide?"

"No. I used to be a buttonhole maker at Gumbiner's Snappie Suit Shoppe. Have you ever sat all day and made buttonholes? It preys on your mind."

"I see," nodded Tug. "Something finally snapped?"

"No." The man shook his head. "I was promoted to collars and cuffs, when there was a strike and we were picketed. One of the pickets was a girl called Lily. We fell in love at first sight. I even had the license."

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"Then you had a quarrel?"

"No. The strike ended, Lily jilted me, they took me off of collars and cuffs, and there I was—back making buttonholes."

"Committing suicide won't get you any place," Tug argued. "Besides, you are causing a traffic jam in the street. It isn't fair to the city."

"I may sit here for several days," sighed Sidney Mandragon. "I like to watch the crowd."

Tug decided to try a long shot. "What would your parents think of all this?" he inquired.

"Nothing," replied Mandragon. "I was born an orphan."

"Then you're in for a surprise," Tug announced triumphantly. "Behind me stands your long lost father!"

"Ahoy, sonny!" Rat-line Sam stuck his head out the window, took one look at Sidney Mandragon's guinea pig face and withdrew hastily. "Holy squids!" he growled at Tug. "Even in fun I wouldn't admit havin' a creetcher like that for an offspring!"

"This is for a good cause," urged Tug. "You hold his attention while I climb out the other window and sneak up on him from behind."

Sam crawled over the window sill, eyeing Sidney Mandragon distastefully. "The spittin' image of your ma," he declared. "It was on the good ship *Suzy P. Hawkins*. Right after the storm hit, I seen her carefully wrappin' you in a life preserver—"

Inch by inch Rat-line Sam crept along the ledge, and Mandragon backed away from him suspiciously.

At the same time, Tug was approaching on a narrower ledge around the corner. It was dangerous business, and the crowd below looked like a swarm of black ants. Slinking up from behind, Tug hooked one arm around Mandragon's waist and lifted him.

Rat-line Sam scuttled back into the building while Tug did a tight-wire act across the ledge. Sidney Mandragon clawed at the wall, squealing like a hog in a butcher shop. As Tug lowered him through the window, he gave a wild yell and clamped his teeth securely on the fleshy part of Tug's hand.

"YOU ongrateful swab!" Rat-line Sam snatched a vase full of flowers from the nearest desk and hurled it at Mandragon's head. This would probably have caused little commotion had it not been for the fact that Inspector McGivens suddenly got between missile and target. The vase lifted McGivens' bowler and sent him crumpling to he floor amid a shower of rose petals.

Even this might have brought no serious consequence if Sergeant O'Toole of the homicide squad had not entered just as the vase landed.

Leaping across the room, O'Toole thumped a stiff uppercut to Rat-line Sam's chin. Sam reeled groggily and stumbled into the center of the black-jack game, scattering cards, money and newspaper men in all directions.

Flash bulbs popped, policemen scurried to O'Toole's aid, and Tug Raffin looked around in time to see Rat-line Sam heave an adding machine through the frosted glass door.

Since Sidney Mandragon's teeth were still imbedded in his hand, Tug was at a disadvantage. Muttering a severe oath, he pinched the little man's windpipe, then applied a short but efficient straightarm between the round bulgy eyes. Sidney Mandragon caracoled backward and disappeared through the hole in the door.

Tug Raffin was now ready for action.

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It is a pity Sergeant O'Toole never knew what hit him, for he would have appreciated the finesse with which Tug Raffin applied Jiujitsu Rule No. 28 in the patrolman's handbook.

The assisting policemen, however, enjoyed the full benefit of Tug's maneuver, for O'Toole's rigid figure landed in their midst, flopping them over like tenpins. Rat-line Sam procured a typewriter from somewhere and was preparing to demolish it on one of the *Chronicle's* most promising legmen, when Tug restrained him.

"Up anchor!" Tug rapped. "These bulls mean trouble."

Rat-line Sam dropped the typewriter wistfully, dogged Tug into the corridor, and they took the ten flights of stairs at full clip. "Blow me down," panted Sam. "That was a good scrap. I wouldn't have enjoyed myself so much if the lubber *had* jumped!"

"Don't talk about that ungrateful scum," Tug rumbled. "He bit me."

They reached the bottom floor, darted onto the crowded street and headed in the direction of the Bilge and Binnacle Club.

II

THE Bilge and Binnacle Club, in case someone is interested, is a social organization exclusively for seamen of good character and high moral standing. Its purpose is to promote good fellowship and brotherly love among our merchant mariners of the western coast, and its clubroom is on Fort Street, in the back of Istvan Karamoz's saloon.

If you can get through the saloon, you'll admit that the clubroom is a pretty cozy place, since it is filled with comfortable iron cots and furniture off the *Minnie A. Caine*. The walls are all decorated with pictures from the rotogravure section, and hanging above the door is a stuffed salmon which Little Clancy brought back from Klamath Falls.

There is not much else to say about the Bilge and Binnacle Club except that Tug Raffin is president and that he does his best to uphold the sterling principles for which it was founded.

When Tug and Rat-line Sam reached the clubroom, they encountered an atmosphere of intense gloom. Bottlenose Billings appeared to be chewing on a quince, and Joe Lemon's acidulous features looked like the engraving on a tombstone.

Before Tug could ask what the trouble was, the four Zymanski brothers entered in single file and seated themselves side by side on a cot. It is impossible to tell one Zymanski from another, as they all have bushy black whiskers and eyes that resemble something peering out of a cave; but Tug knew that their hearts were heavy.

"'Smatter?" inquired Tug. "I thought you guys were going down to meet that ship from Vladivostok. Wouldn't the skipper give you enough vodka?"

"Yess," hissed one of the Zymanskis. "But at the doks we see Liddle Clancy. He giffs us the bad noos."

"What bad news?"

"Ha!" The second Zymanski wagged his head sadly. "He ain't heard!"

"It's this way," said Bottlenose Billings. "The Bilge and Binnacles have got to look for a new clubroom."

"We'll never find one," moped Joe Lemon. "In the first place, nobody'd let us in, and in the second place, they might want us to pay rent."

"Karamoz won't kick us out," protested Tug. "We've got an agreement—"

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"It ain't Karamoz," explained Billings. "It's a party by the name of Jake Begelman."

"Avast," muttered Rat-line Sam. "Not the big-shot gambler?"

"The same," nodded Billings. "Istvan Karamoz has been playin' the dogs, usin' Begelman for a bookie. Up to date he owes Begelman five thousand smackers."

"Karamoz has never smelled that much dough," said Tug.

"How true," sighed Joe Lemon. "So Begelman has decided to take this saloon instead. Karamoz will get kicked out in the cold—and us Bilge and Binnacles with him."

"This is a predicament," stated Tug. "We must consider it carefully."

The consideration was getting no place fast when Little Clancy stuck his head through the doorway and greeted them with a bright leer. "I got some good news," he announced. "Our troubles is over."

"How come?" Tug arched one eyebrow dubiously.

Keeping the door partly closed, Little Clancy edged into the room looking like a red-headed facsimile of the Mysterious Mr. X. "I have it all figured out," he announced. "There's only one thing we need to get a new clubroom—money!"

"At present the treasury contains just one dollar and fifty-four cents," Tug reminded him. "Figure that one out."

Little Clancy winked knowingly. "I got the key to a fortune," he said, with a grandiloquent gesture. "I have the sole managing rights to a guy whose fame is already known to thousands and whose name will go down in hist'ry along with Steve Brody and Tarzan of the Apes. Introducin' the one and only Suicide Sid!"

HE JERKED the door open wide. Standing before them, his baggy trousers wrinkled around his ankles and his nose twitching nervously, was none other than Sidney Mandragon.

A number of expressions flitted across Tug Raffin's face, but the one that settled finally could be labeled disgust. "That cluck has caused me enough trouble," he snapped. "Get him out of here."

"Wait a minute," growled Joe Lemon. "Let's hear Little Clancy's side of it."

"I picked Sid up this afternoon at the waterfront," stated Little Clancy. "I knew him right away because his pitcher was in the afternoon sheets. Right then I figgered I had something."

"What's he good for?" asked Bottlenose Billings, staring at Mandragon critically.

"Sid has lost interest in life," said Little Clancy. "He is determined to commit suicide, and he don't care how or when he does it. In other words, he is absolutely fearless."

"Go on," said Joe Lemon. "What's the deal?"

"He has agreed to do anything we say—take any sort of a risk," Little Clancy continued. "All we got to do is guarantee that before he casshes in, his name will be famous."

"Sounds screwy," commented Joe Lemon. "Where does the dough come in?"

"All his earnin's belong to us," said Little Clancy. "Look at the crowd he drew today. Think of the jack we could of collected if that mob had been payin' admission!"

"Yeah," nodded Bottlenose Billings. "But ain't it against the law to commit suicide?"

"Not if you don't do it intentionally," explained Little Clancy. "We won't

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let Sid get knocked off right away. First we'll build him a reputation as a guy who sneers at danger. Then when he's famous, we'll hire a stadium an' have him do somethin' hard—like hanging from a balloon by his teeth. The crowd'll love it!"

"Yes!" hissed the Zymanski brothers in unison. "That iss a swell idea!"

"I refuse to have a part in it," said Tug Raffin hotly. "I won't profiteer in human misery."

"You shouldn't mind if I don't," said Sidney Mandragon meekly.

"A fine specimen of a man," sneered Tug. "Haven't you any spunk at all?"

"No," said Mandragon dejectedly. "There isn't any reason for me."

"According to the constitution, when there is a disagreement among club members, the matter shall be settled by majority vote," Tug proclaimed, rapping on the table with a gavel. "All in favor of Little Clancy's scheme put up your hands."

Every hand shot up. Tug turned to Rat-line Sam. "I thought you were on my side," he said disappointedly.

"I was," Sam replied. "But I don't want to miss seein' the lubber do that trick with the balloon."

Tug threw down the gavel and stalked from the room in disgust. As the door slammed behind him, he found himself staring into the cold, sinister eyes of Jake Begelman.

III

JAKE BEGELMAN could probably be called the Latin type. That is, he had sleek hair and sharp foxy features which seemed to match his tapering hands. There was never any fooling around with Jake Begelman; he was tough, and he had six bodyguards to prove it.

When he met Tug, however, the bodyguards were all lined up at the bar having a quick snort.

"Hello, Tug," said Begelman politely. "I have come for you know what. This saloon and chattels thereof now belong to me. I am taking the joint over tonight."

"A rotten trick," said Tug. "You couldn't get away with this in court."

"I never go to court. My clients either pay up or else—" Begelman pulled a raw turnip from his coat pocket and munched it thoughtfully. "I got a bum stomach," he explained. "Nothing like raw vegetables for a bum stomach. I always carry a pocketful."

"You're meaner than I thought," said Tug. "What's more, I believe you're downright crooked."

Begelman scowled and continued to crunch the turnip noisily. Before he could reply, a girl with frizzly straw-colored hair swished across the saloon and punched him in the ribs. "Don't take all night, Snookie," she said in a whisky voice. "The feature start at seven-five."

"Okay, Honeybunch," nodded Begelman. He tossed the rest of the turnip into the five hundred hole of a skee-ball machine and dabbed his lips with a silk handkerchief. "This is my girl friend, Miss Dingle," he told Tug. "Cute trick huh?"

Tug said nothing. He was wondering whether the green stuff on her eyelids was a cosmetic or some kind of horrible affliction.

"I'll be havin' a beer in the car, Snookie," said the girl. "How long'll it take you to get those sailors outa here?"

"You and your pals had better find a new hangout," said Begelman. "Tonight!"

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"We know our rights," Tug retorted. "We don't leave without two weeks' notice."

"It is against my principle to argue," said Begelman firmly. His had zipped inside his coat and came out clutching an automatic, which he shoved toward Tug's face.

TO POKE a gun at Tug Raffin is bad business, especially if you are not at least a black-belt man at jiujitsu. Being unaware of the sad fate which only that morning overtook Sergeant O'Toole, Jake Begelman did his gun-poking in comparative naïveté.

An instant later, Tug's arms were around his waist, and he was jiggling upand down like the working end of a pneumatic drill. His jaws clicking, Begelman dropped the gun and bellowed for his gorillas.

Tug whipped him around, gave him a short uppercut to the jaw. Begelman collapsed like a punctured tire, his girl friend fled screaming to the street, the six bodyguards lurched from the bar, and the Bilge and Binnacles burst from the back room.

It is said that most great battles are won by the side which takes the incentive. Strategists who support this theory would do well to examine the battle of Istvan Karamoz's saloon.

The four Zymanski brothers bore the brunt of the attack, charging in like ten ton tanks and immediately silencing the enemy's artillery, A few gunshots slapped the rafters, but these ceased as the enemy entrenched themselves behind the bar and strafed the Bilge and Binnacles with glassware, cutlery and beer bottles.

Dropping back to a fortified position beside the juke box, Joe Lemon scooped up a spittoon, grenaded it across the room and heard it land with a pleasing *thonk* on someone's skull.

Rat-line Sam was stuffing slugs into the skee-ball machine and lobbing the wooden spheres over the bar with trench mortar precison. Wriggling from under a table on his hands and knees, Little Clancy went on a reconnoitering expedition and came back smirking.

"I just sneaked around the bar and kicked over that hamburger grill," he informed Tug. "The gas outlet is pointed straight at those mugs." He rolled up a newspaper, set fire to one end and hurled it over the counter.

A bright splash of flame poofed up from behind the bar, and with a collective howl Jake Begelman's men scrambled into the open. The Zymanski brothers greeted them joyfully, knocking their heads together and booting them into the street. Bottlenose Billings extinguishing the blazing jet with a wad of wet tablecloths.

"Where's Begelman?" said Tug sharply. "He's gone."

"I didn't see him," said Joe Lemon. "He must've went out the back way."

Tug dashed into the clubroom and discovered Sidney Mandragon seated at the table playing solitaire. "Did you see a guy go through here?" he asked.

"Yes," nodded Mandragon, placing a red nine on a black ten. "He was in a hurry."

"With all this excitement going on," said Tug, "how can you sit there and play cards?"

"It's easy," was the reply. "I just deal out seven stacks face down—"

"I never knew a guy could be so dumb," Tug interrupted. "You're the dumbest dope I ever met."

"That," said Mandragon reflectively, "is exactly what Lily told me. She'll be sorry when she sees my picture in the paper."

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"Lissen, Sid ole boy," said Little Clancy, who had entered in time to overhear him. "When we're finished with you, your puss will be on every front page in the U.S."

"That's nice," sighed Sidney Mandragon. His mouth bent into a faint smile, and for a moment Tug almost believed he was thinking.

THE next morning Little Clancy went out for awhile and came back burbling with enthusiasm, "I got Sid his first break," he announced. "All he has to do is sit all day on the flagpole of the Bijou Theater, and the manager will pay ten bucks."

"Old stuff," complained Joe Lemon. "Flagpole sitting is *passé*."

"Maybe," said Little Clancy. "But for ten bucks we'll revive it."

The Bijou's flagpole was on top of a tower five stories above the street. Rat-line Sam spliced a bosun's chair to the end of the flag rope, and Mandragon inspected it curiously. "Are you sure this is safe?" Mandragon asked.

"For a guy who wants to commit suicide, you're awful particular," said Sam. "Lash him in."

The Zymanskis tied him to the chair, hoisted him to the top of the pole, and went down to the waterfront to drink vodka with the sea captain from Vladivostok. The other Bilge and Binnacles returned to the clubroom for a snooze. It was after eight o'clock before anyone remembered Sidney Mandragon.

A cold fog hung over the city when they returned to the tower of the Bijou Theater, and the top of the flagpole was entirely obscured. Joe Leman and Bottlenose Billings started to lower the bosun's chair; but the rope hung limp and loose. "Something's wrong," observed Billings. "He won't come down."

"The pulley's jammed," said Joe Lemon.

"Who'll fix it?" asked Little Clancy. "We can't leave Sid up there all night."

"There's only one man amongst us able to shinny up a wet flagpole," said Rat-line Sam pointedly. He was looking at Tug Raffin.

"I told you I'd have nothing to do with this scheme," said Tug. "Count me out."

"You ain't scared?" Little Clancy had a way of putting a sneer into his voice when he wanted to be especially provoking. Tug was aware of the trick, but there was nothing he could do except be provoked.

"Okay," he consented. "Give me a hand."

They boosted Tug up to where he could get a foothold on the flagpole cleat. Then he wrapped his legs around the slippery pillar and began inching his way upward. Traffic lights flashed far below, horns honked, and the people scuttled between safety zones oblivious of the struggle between man and gravity that was going on above them.

As Tug went higher, the pole seemed to dwindle into a swaying matchstick. His legs ached, his breath burned his throat, and he felt himself slipping back slowly and maddeningly. With a last superhuman effort, he scrooched up another foot and managed to grasp the rope on the side of the bosun's chair.

"Hello," said Sidney Mandragon complacently. "What are you doing up here?"

"What do you think," gasped Tug. "I'm here to rescue you."

"I like it here," Mandragon replied. "At night it's very restful, and during the day, the people on the street stop to stare at me. When I was making

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buttonholes, nobody ever gave me a second glance."

"I wish I'd never given you a first one," Tug retorted. He climbed onto the chair, gripped the knob of the flagpole and worked about ten minutes putting the fouled rope back on the pulley wheel. When this was accomplished, they both descended easily.

"Good work, my lad!" beamed Ratline Sam, slapping Tug on the back and pulling a flat bottle from his hip. "This calls for a snort."

Tug waved the bottle away and glowered at Little Clancy. "Look here," he said irately. "I've rescued this jellyfish twice in two days. If he gets up on any more high places, he stays there."

"The flagpole sittin' ain't so hot," admitted Little Clancy. "Tomorrow we'll bury him alive."

"Huh?"

"It's a good racket," said Little Clancy. "There's a guy in Los Angeles who made twenty bucks a day by being buried alive. Today he's a rich man, and all he started out with was a hole in the ground."

"Sure," nodded Bottlenose Billings. "We'll charge two bits admission—"

"Hoy!" The four Zymanski brothers came piling onto the rooftop, chock full of vodka and bursting with exuberance. "We come to get you!" shouted the first Zymanski.

"Yess," said Zymanski No. 2. "We don't want you should miss it."

"Miss what?" asked Tug.

"The East Harbor Sugar Company iss burning," added the third Zymanski. "Ain't it fine?"

"Wait a minute," said Tug suspiciously. "You guys didn't have anything to do with this?"

"Uss?" The fourth Zymanski shook his head vigorously.

"You were fired off one of those sugar boats a year ago," Tug reminded them. "At that time you threatened to get even."

"Then we was Reds," explained the first Zymanski. "Since the last election we're Republicans."

"You swabs can argie all you like," cut in Rat-line Sam. "I'm goin' to the fire!"

IV

LITTLE CLANCY took Sidney Mandragon by the hand, and they all clattered down the stair well. As they neared the waterfront, they could hear sirens shrieking and see a blotch of flame on the low backdrop of clouds. The street was clogged with people, automobiles and fire-fighting equipment, while Tony Boggio, the peanut man, had already set up shop on a strategic corner. With the stage set, all that remained was for someone to provide the drama.

It was then that the Bilge and Binnacles arrived.

The East Harbor sugar refinery was a big brick structure which stood on the end of a narrow spit of land. Offices occupied the front part of the building, and the back part sloped off into a dock shed which could accomodate several ships.

There was a long stretch of ground between the building and the street, and the police had stretched a rope across to keep the crowd back. This seemed to be a wise move because flame glared from the front windows, the bricks were turning black, and the wall appeared liable to collapse at any moment.

Even the firemen stood at a respectful distance, squirting streams of water at the crumbly bricks. Since the build-

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ing occupied the entire breadth of the spit, they could not get around to the rear.

Tug Raffin perched himself on the roof of a freight car and was rolling a cigarette when Little Clancy bobbed up beside him. "I just heard somethin' from one of the cops," Little Clancy said excitedly. "There's ten thousand bucks in cash inside of that building—a week's payroll!"

"So what?" asked Tug.

"It's locked in one of them old-time cribs that get red hot durin' a fire," explained Little Clancy. "By morning those lovely greenbacks will be nothin' but ashes unless—"

"You're not suggesting that we steal that dough?" said Tug righteously.

Little Clancy seemed hurt. "I am saying that the money should be saved," he answered. "And the person who will save it is Sidney Mandragon!"

"Don't be foolish," said Tug. "Do you expect that shrimp to rush inside a burning building and crack a safe?"

"It could be done," said Little Clancy, "Especially if you and the Zymanskis helped him. The Zymanskis know where the safe is located, and it would be easy for them to heave it out a window."

"It's suicide to go in there," protested Tug.

"Not if you take a rowboat and enter by way of the wharf," suggested Little Clancy. "Only the front is burning. I seen an empty rowboat over by the fish jetty."

"Why should we risk our necks for somebody else's dough?" countered Tug.

"It ain't the dough," confided Little Clancy, "it's the publicity. You go in the back way, but Sid Mandragon enters the front door—before all these people. The money is rescued, and Sid becomes a public hero open to radio and movie contracts. That's when we start haulin' in the profits. Are you game to try it?"

When he was a small boy, Tug Raffin could never refuse a dare. That is why, against his better judgment, he soon found himself gliding across the harbor in a rowboat bulging with Zymanskis. It was a fairly easy task to reach the wharf and enter the sugar refinery through the rear.

At first Tug wondered why the firemen had not thought of this idea themselves; when he saw that not only the front wall but the two side walls were ready to buckle—which meant that the whole structure would fold like a smashed egg crate. The Zymanskis noticed it too, and their whiskers were damp from excitement.

Tug pressed a light switch and was amazed to find that it worked. They were in a huge room filled with machinery, cooking vats and clouds of heavy smoke. A corridor led to the front of the building, where the fire was really raging. Tug went as far as he could and turned to the Zymanskis. "This building can't hold up much longer," he stated. "If Mandragon doesn't meet us here in two minutes, we'll scram."

Sidney Mandragon was on his way.

OUT in front, the firemen were still squirting water, the crowd was munching Tony Boggio's peanuts, and Little Clancy was standing by the guard rope keeping an eye on his watch. "They oughta be inside now," he told Sidney Mandragon. "All you got to do is keep runnin' till you reach the main entrance."

"The main entrance is on fire," Mandragon pointed out.

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"That makes it all the more thrillin'," said Little Clancy. "The crowd'll love it."

"Suppose we wait a little while," said Mandragon. He started to sidle away.

Little Clancy's red eyebrows dropped into a scowl. "Suppose we don't," he grated, thrusting the man under the rope. "Get goin'!"

To augment this command, Bottlenose Billings unhinged a small clasp knife and needled the blade into the seat of Mandragon's shiny trousers. With a blood curdling yell, Mandragon broke from the crowd and raced across the clearing.

A roar of surprise burst from hundreds of throats. Two policemen scooted after him, but gave up the chase as he neared the doomed building. The spray of a fireman's hose followed him through the flaming doorway, and as the blaze closed around him, he fell flat on his face. A pair of powerful hands gripped his collar, dragging him to safety, and he stared up at the granite features of Tug Raffin.

"You've more nerve than I gave you credit for," said Tug. "I didn't think you'd get through."

"Somebody stabbed me," gasped Mandragon. "They chased me all the way—"

"Neffer mind the details," rumbled one of the Zymanskis. "We got to find the money."

Ascending a circular staircase, they entered a room that was like the inside of a kiln. The plaster was melting from the walls and large chunks of ceiling plopped from charred lathes. Sitting snugly in one corner was a green safe.

"The payroll must be in there," said Tug. "How'll we get it out?"

"Like thiss!" stated the Zymanskis. Crouching low, each one took a corner of the safe and lifted it off the floor. They had it halfway to the staircase before Tug noticed something peculiar. "Look," he exclaimed. "The thing's open!"

The Zymanskis lowered their burden. Tug swung the door wide and glanced inside. The safe contained nothing except a few papers.

"A swindle!" frothed the first Zymanski. "We haff been took!"

Discussion was out of the question, for the walls were beginning to crumple alarmingly. Flames blocked the staircase, so Tug hustled into another corridor with Sidney Mandragon in tow and the Zymanskis clumping behind.

They emerged onto a broad balcony overlooking the large, machinery-filled room, and a horrible rasping sound came from the rafters. The roof was slowly slipping, bricks spattered on the floor, and a ring of fire cut off every avenue of escape.

Stumbling over a heap of sugar sacks, Tug spotted an enclosed metal chute. Without stopping to ponder, he lifted Sidney Mandragon and tossed him into the chute head first. Like trained walruses, the Zymanskis flippered into the aperture eagerly. Tug dived in behind, just as the roof started to drop. A crashing roar hammered his eardrums, and he went hurtling off into the darkness. With a heart-stopping swoop he sailed out into space and, for an instant, seemed to be hanging in mid-air.

The instant ended too soon, for Tug Raffin descended like a plummet into the wintery waters of the bay.

This was one of the few times in his life that Tug regretted he had never learned how to swim.

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He clawed his way back to the surface and saw before him the scarlet bow of the city fireboat. He started to call for help, but a strong current dragged him about fifteen yards, smacking him against a wharf pile coated with barnacles.

Although mutually gregarious, barnacles are always resentful toward strangers, and their spiny shells kept Tug from getting any kind of a hold. He went down a second time, came up clutching for straws, and his fingers closed around the gunwale of the rowboat which had been borrowed from the fish jetty.

Tug pulled himself into the boat and lay there panting. When he regained his breath, he could hear flames crackling and see spouts of water curving from the side of the city fireboat. Searchlights played on the surface, revealing no sign of Sidney Mandragon or the four Zymanskis.

Tug paddled around the wharf for a while, then gave a sigh of despair and rowed off into the darkness.

WHEN he reached the Bilge and Binnacle headquarters, Tug found Joe Lemon and Rat-line Sam gloomily polishing off a pint of Karamoz's Best-brand Whiskey. "Holy squids!" gasped Sam, his fingers trembling so that he nearly dropped the bottle. "We thought you was a goner."

Tug gave them a damp scowl. "Where is Little Clancy?" he demanded.

"We lost track of him after the fire," said Joe Lemon. "How'd you get so wet?"

"I climbed into some kind of chute," said Tug. "It emptied me into the bay."

"Oh, yes," nodded Joe Lemon. "They use it to slide sugar sacks into the hold of a ship. Very useful thing."

"Mandragon and the Zymanskis went ahead of me," Tug added grimly. "I think they were drowned."

"Them Zymanskis wouldn't sink," said Rat-line Sam. "They got too much blubber."

"Nevertheless, they are gone," Tug insisted. "And the blame falls on one man—Little Clancy!"

The words had hardly left his mouth when Little Clancy jaunted into the room with Sidney Mandragon trailing behind. "Greetings, gents," Little Clancy beamed. "Take a hinge at the man of the hour: 'Daredevil Sid, the Suicide Kid'!"

Tug stood there gaping. "Where'd you find him?" he asked.

"At the police station," replied Little Clancy casually. "The city fireboat fished him out of the bay. They picked up the Zymanskis too."

"Aye," nodded Rat-line Sam. "I knew they wouldn't sink."

"Sid is now a full-fledged hero," announced Little Clancy proudly.

"It really wasn't much," said Sidney Mandragon, his eyelids drooping. "When I saw those men in the refinery, I knew they were trapped. So at the risk of my life—"

"Shut up," said Little Clancy brusquely. "That speech is for the reporters—not us."

"You don't expect anybody to believe such a yarn?" said Tug incredulously. "It's too fantastic!"

"Hey! Have you seen the paper?"

Bottlenose Billings galloped in waving a copy of the *Morning Chronicle*. Tug took the paper away from him and spread it out on the table. Next to a picture of the fire was a pop-eyed photograph of Sidney Mandragon. Tug stared at the lead story astonishedly. It read:

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SPECTATOR RISKS LIFE TO CAPTURE FIREBUGS

While the East Harbor Sugar Refinery was being razed by a million dollar blaze, Sidney Mandragon, a spectator, broke police lines and rushed into the flaming structure to capture four men assertedly accused of setting fire to the building in order to conceal the theft of the refinery payroll.

The prisoners, who refused to give any name other than "Zymanski," were reputedly former employees of the refinery and had been discharged from a company vessel only last year, it was reported.

Mandragon will be remembered as the man who only two days ago thrilled the entire city by threatening to jump from the eleventh floor of a downtown office building.

"It wasn't really much," Mandragon declared when questioned by reporters. "When I saw those men in the refinery, I knew they were trapped. So at the risk of my life. . . ."

Tug Raffin crumpled the paper and threw it on the floor in disgust. "A fine mess you've got us into!" he stormed, shaking a forefinger at Little Clancy. "What'll we do about the Zymanskis?"

"This is no time for foolish questions," said Little Clancy. "It is more important that we get Sid some dry blankets before he catches pneumonia."

With a cavalier swagger Sidney Mandragon retrieved the crumpled newspaper and brushed it off carefully. "Not a bad likeness," he said, holding his photograph at arm's length. "Somebody run out and get me a bundle of these right away."

Tug noted that the squeaky rodent quality was missing from his voice.

V

FOR nearly a week the Bilge and Binnacles remained in comparative peace and quiet, the Zymanski brothers remained in jail, and Tug Raffin remained perplexed. The first cause of his perplexity was the fact that Jake Begelman had not returned to take possession of Istvan Karamoz's saloon. Men of Begelman's ilk didn't give up that easily. Or perhaps Begelman was waiting for Karamoz to repair the damaged bar before taking another try at annexation.

Tug's second worry was that mental quagmire, Sidney Mandragon. Although naturally on the obnoxious side, Mandragon was actually becoming offensive.

He had removed Little Clancy's stuffed salmon from above the door and replaced it with a large newspaper cut of himself. He appropriated Tug's bed, Joe Lemon's striped shirt and Ratline Sam's ivory-clawed back scratcher. All this was done in an insidious "I-hope-you-don't-mind" manner which no one felt able to contest.

"The little punk," growled Tug one evening as he and Bottlenose Billings were drinking boilermakers at the bar. "He's got us where he wants us. Only his testimony can free the Zymanskis."

"No judge would ever believe *us*," admitted Billings. "We got to keep him happy. If he should get downhearted and cut his throat—"

"Gr-r," said Tug, smacking his fist on the mahogany. "He thinks he's a hero. In my opinion, he's forgotten all about committing suicide."

"No." Bottlenose Billings wagged his head confidently. "Little Clancy says that when the proper time comes, Sidney Mandragon will destroy himself like a gentleman. It's sort of sad when you think about it. His gal jilted him—"

"I've heard the story before," snapped Tug unsympathetically.

About that time Little Clancy barged in, his stubby nose red with exhilaration. "There's a sixty-mile gale out-

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side the harbor!" he blurted, twisting Tug around on the bar stool. "The gambling ship *Excelsior* has been washed on the rocks with fifty passengers aboard. It's the chance of a lifetime!"

"Chance for what?" Tug's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"Look," said Little Clancy. "The ship is on the rocks—fallin' apart. The sea is so high they can't lower a boat, an' the distance is so far they can't shoot a lifeline. A thousand bucks has been offered to anyone who will find a way to get the passengers ashore!"

"I won't risk my neck again for anybody," Tug informed him crisply.

"Sid will do it," returned Little Clancy. "Single-handed he will string a lifeline from shore to ship. Where is he?"

"In bed," said Tug. "In my bed."

Little Clancy ducked into the clubroom and emerged shortly dragging a bleary-eyed Sidney Mandragon. "Follow me," he said beckoning to Tug and Bottlenose Billings. "We might need you at the pier."

THEY slopped through a driving rain and ended up at the Luxury Sport Fishing Pier, which is on the south side of the breakwater. A monstrous sea was running, and far off to the left were the lights of the *Excelsior*.

The gambling ship had gone aground near the high palisade that overlooks Lazarus Rock. At the end of the pier they saw a sleek motor launch with a canvas top, careening against the pilings.

"Ahoy, lads—make ready to shove off!"

The voice came from the launch. Tug descended the water-soaked wharf ladder and spied Rat-line Sam's head protruding from the canvas canopy. "Climb aboard," invited Rat-line Sam. "We'll be off in a cloud of whale dust!"

Tug had no intention of climbing aboard, but a comber crashed over the ladder, knocking him off balance. The first thing he clutched was the side of the launch, and Rat-line Sam pulled him in. "Where did you get this boat?" Tug sputtered.

"Borrowed it from Sixpoints Basin," said Rat-line Sam. "I was for takin' a sweet little yawl, but Joe Lemon says this is better."

Joe Lemon was at the controls. "We can't stay here much longer," he mumbled. "Where's Little Clancy?"

A sprawling figure floundered over the side. It was Sidney Mandragon. Little Clancy leaped in lightly, followed by Billings. "There was some newspaper guys on the pier," explained Little Clancy. "I had to let 'em get Sid's picture."

"I don't like this," complained Mandragon. "Boats always make me seasick."

Rat-line Sam threw off the mooring line, and the launch streaked foreward like a swordfish, a coil of rope singing from the stern. Ploughing through mountainous swells, the boat headed for the stranded *Excelsior's* windward side. The gambling ship was an old four-master with the sticks cut off and a turtletop placed over the midship section. She canted dangerously, and people were lined against the rail. A rope ladder dangled from the after end.

As the launch approached the ladder, Little Clancy jabbed Mandragon in the ribs. "Now's your chance," he barked. "Put this rope around your waist and grab for the ladder!"

Mandragon lay on the bottom of the launch, his face like a pale beacon in

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the night. "You fellows will have to excuse me," he groaned. "I'm too sick to move."

"Men and women are trapped aboard that ship," said Tug Raffin earnestly. "This is one opportunity for you to risk your life for a good cause."

"Go away," was the peevish reply.

"Sid, ole pal," pleaded Little Clancy. "You can't let us down—"

"Don't bother with the rat," snarled Tug. "I'll do it myself!" He crawled out on the stern and wrapped the loose end of rope around his waist.

When the launch was directly beneath the gambling ship's counter, Tug leaped for the ladder and caught hold of the bottom rung. Joe Lemon kicked the launch into reverse, and for nearly thirty seconds it clung to the top of a swell, the ladder knocking against its port side.

"Come on!" urged Little Clancy. "It's a cinch!"

WHEN Tug reached the *Excelsior's* deck, he glanced down and saw Little Clancy coming up the ladder also, with Billings and Rat-line Sam directly behind. The launch and Joe Lemon vanished into the storm.

Tug immediately tied his end of rope around a stanchion and began to haul. "Heave-ho!" grunted Rat-line Sam. He helped Tug drag in the lifeline, and his mustaches fluffed in the wind heroically. "Blast me, if this ain't like old times. It's good to be rid of that slabber-jawed weakfish—"

A mighty yank brought about ten yards of line over the *Excelsior's* rail, and with the line came a limp, bedraggled figure that looked suspiciously like Sidney Mandragon.

Tug stared first at Mandragon and then at Little Clancy. "How did he get on the line?" he said annoyedly.

"I figgured Sid was too valuable to leave behind," said Little Clancy. "So I fastened his belt to the coil of rope. I knew he'd be dragged in when you started to tighten the lifeline."

Tug seemed ready to explode, but he kept hauling. Within an hour a taut line stretched from the ship to the palisades, and a breeches buoy shuttled back and forth, carrying passengers to safety. Tug was busily supervising the rescue work when somebody gave him a sharp dig in the back. It was a girl with fuzzy hair and lynx eyes.

"Hello, handsome," she said. "Until you boys got here, I thought I was gonna keep a date with an angel."

"Miss Dingle," said Tug curiously. "How come you're aboard?"

"I'm waitin' for Snookie," she replied. "He's downstairs countin' the take."

"You mean that Jake Begelman is on this ship too?"

"Wise up," said Miss Dingle. "He owns the tub."

Tug looked as if he had been hit on the head with a hammer.

"I think you're kinda cute," she said, fastening an octopus grip on his arm. "Let's you and me have a beer while the cash customers are gettin' rescued."

Although he was never much at handling women, Tug saw a wild, amorous light in Miss Dingle's green eyes and knew that some drastic action had to be taken immediately. Before she could emit even a coy squeal, he lifted her in his arms and deposited her in the breeches buoy which hung by the rail waiting for another passenger. A quick jerk at the hauling line, and Miss Dingle went sailing shoreward.

"You bum!" she shrieked. "You lousy, tow-headed bum—"

Tug swung around and ran squarely into the open end of an automatic re-

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volver. In back of the gun stood a crude looking person whom Tug recognized as one of Jake Begelman's trained gorillas. "Flirtin' with the boss's doll, hey?" sneered the gunman. "Come along, boy scout."

"Okay." Tug let the man lead him into the spacious gambling room and down a flight of stairs into a room label "Office." Here he saw Jake Begelman seated at a desk stuffing greenbacks into a leather satchel.

"Have a chair," said Begelman calmly. "Are the customers ashore yet?"

"Most of them," replied Tug.

"That's good," said Begelman. "It would give my business a bad name if any of my clients were drowned." A bowl of uncooked vegetables rested on the desk top. He nibbled a Lima bean.

"See here," said Tug. "The Bilge and Binnacles have done you a great service. The only reward we want is for you to let us keep our clubroom. It isn't much to ask."

"True," admitted Begelman. "But now that my ship is wrecked, I intend to take over the saloon and put a wheel in the back room. It would be inconvenient to have you guys sleeping under the roulette table."

LITTLE Clancy, Billings and Ratline Sam crowded into the room, escorted by the five other bodyguards. Little Clancy had a black eye, and Billing's peculiar nose was a bluish color. Begelman clicked his satchel shut and chewed at a stalk of rhubarb.

"There's only four of 'em," he observed. "You told me there was one more."

"The last guy don't amount to much," said a tall, scar-faced man who stood guard at the door.

"Bring him down anyway."

The man edged from the office and came back with Sidney Mandragon draped over his shoulder like a serape. Mandragon slid to the floor head first, and an orange-colored conical object fell from the upper pocket of his coat. It was a withered carrot.

Tug dropped beside him and held the carrot in front of Mandragon's face. "Where did you get this?" he asked.

"Take it away," groaned Mandragon, gulping hard.

"You couldn't be seasick now," insisted Tug. "The ship isn't moving. She's on the rocks."

Mandragon sat up, looking greatly relieved. For several seconds his round eyes were concentrated on the carrot. "I think I remember," he said slowly. "I found it on the floor of the sugar refinery the night of the fire. It was lying near the safe. I am very fond of carrots and intended to eat it; but—"

"Aha," said Tug reflectively. "There is probably only one man in the world who carries raw vegetables around in his pockets. He was in the sugar mill the night of the fire. He stole the payroll and then set fire to the building to hide his theft."

"Very amusing," said Begelman in a frosty voice. "Do you think a jury would convict me on the evidence offered by one decayed carrot?"

"No," said Tug. "But I've a hunch the money in that satchel has the same serial numbers as the stolen payroll."

"I guess there's no harm in admitting it," sighed Begelman. "I don't usually stoop to safe-cracking, but the gambling ship business has fallen off, and I was in need of ready cash. You guys have been in my hair too long. Now I intend to take care of you."

"Such gratitude," sneered Little Clancy.

"By morning the ship will have

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fallen apart, and everyone will believe that you went down with it," said Begelman. He rubbed his hands together and looked as sinister as possible. "Have you any last requests?"

"Aye," said Rat-line Sam. "Before I shove off, I'd like to find out how Tug does that joo-jitsoo rasslin' hold —the one he worked on Sergeant O'Toole. I wouldn't die happy unless I knowed it."

"Yeah," said Joe Lemon. "Let him demonstrate it on Sid."

"I suppose it's okay," consented Begelman. "The boys have you covered."

Tug frowned, pulled Sidney Mandragon to his feet. "I learned this from an old *samurai* in Kobe," he stated. "First you grab the opponent's lapels. If he hasn't any lapels, you grab his ears."

"Please use the lapels," suggested Mandragon.

"Having grasped the lapels firmly," Tug continued, "you twist the body thus, and—"

VI

JAKE BEGELMAN'S huskies, though armed to the upper incisors, were by no means prepared for what followed. As if soaring under his own power, Mandragon executed a perfect Immelman and bowled three of them over like a Sunday driver taking out lamps posts.

Rat-line Sam was prepared, however—and the instant Mandragon sailed through the air, he snatched a large turnip from the vegetable bowl and hurled it at the room's single light fixture.

The light went out, and Tug Raffin plunged in the general direction of Begelman. The gambler's card-shuffling fingers found his throat and clung there tenaciously. Begelman had thin arms, but his wrists seemed to be made of steel cables.

Tug tried vainly to break the grasp, his strength fading fast and his red corpuscles screaming for oxygen. In final desperation he fell back across the desk, planted his feet in Begelman's midriff and kicked. The gambler flipped over backward and whapped the floor with his shoulderblades.

Tug picked him up, drove a short right to his chin, and that was the end of Jake Begelman.

The darkness made gunplay impractical, and Begelman's six cohorts were forced to shuffle about the room, feeling for the Bilge and Binnacles blindly. Now and then the sound of earnest scuffling was broken by the splintering of a chair, a low moan or the click of Rat-line Sam's teeth.

If you turn a pack of wild animals loose in a dark, narrow cage, the chances are a hundred to one that only the strongest, toughest and most savage will survive. Biologists call it natural selection; the Bilge and Binnacles call it fun.

Anyhow, when Tug Raffin finally struck a match, the floor was littered with followers of Jake Begelman, who had been put out of commission early in the fray. Over in one corner Little Clancy was hammering his red fists into the inert form of Sidney Mandragon, Billings was slugging Little Clancy and Rat-line Sam was about to dispose of all three with the back of a chair.

The matchlight made everything clear; so they all got up and shook hands—all but Sidney Mandragon, who continued to stare at the ceiling. "Looks like he got the worst of it this time," said Tug. "I feel sort of sorry for the punk."

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Taking possession of all firearms, they led the Begleman crowd to the upper deck. All the passengers and crew of the *Excelsior* had gone ashore. The deserted decks were cold and windswept, trembling with every thudding wave. "She can't hold together much longer," said Rat-line Sam. "We better get ashore afore it's too late."

"Sid has got to go first," insisted Little Clancy. "We must give the credit to him."

"What do we get out of it?" asked Billings.

"Aye," chimed Rat-line Sam. "Why should we do the work an' let that swab grab the limelight?"

"Because that's the way we planned it," said Little Clancy stubbornly. "He gets the glory, but we get the cash. Think of the dough he can make endorsin' toothpaste! If we handle him right, we got a gold mine!"

"As long as we've carried the scheme this far, we might as well go through with it," Tug agreed.

THE tangy air brought Sidney Mandragon back to life, so Tug lifted him into the breeches buoy and stuffed the leather satchel in beside him. "Give this dough to the cops," he instructed. "We'll send the Begelman gang over next. Be sure that the police grab them."

"Yes, sir," said Mandragon, gripping the sides of the buoy nervously.

The *Excelsior* groaned from stem to stern and seemed to be sinking lower and lower. The buoy shuttled back and forth, carrying man after man to the towering palisades. Tug Raffin was the last to go, and as he stood in the darkness waiting for the trolley to return, he could feel the deck tilting beneath his feet. The lifeline creaked, threatening to snap. He heard the ship's hull grinding against jagged rocks. A few moments more, and the *Excelsior* was certain to slide beneath the waves.

Then, like a dancing ghost, the buoy shot toward him. He climbed in, gave the line a jerk and went scudding high above the breakers. A searchlight stabbed out from the shore, the lifeline swayed, and the buoy jounced around crazily like a mote in the wind. Tug looked over his shoulder in time to see the *Excelsior* break cleanly in half.

The buoy had barely reached the end of the bluff when the rope cracked, spilling him onto an expanse of wet grass. He sat there breathing heavily, watching the *Excelsior's* turtletop disappear behind the shoals, and clawing up handfuls of sod to make sure it was all real.

A few yards away, newspapermen were shooting flashlight bulbs and huddling around a small bedraggled man in a gray coat.

"It really wasn't much," Sidney Mandragon was saying. "When I saw the wreck, I knew that those people were trapped. So at the risk of my life—"

"All right, you! Let's go!"

A pair of handcuffs clicked around Tug's wrists, and he beheld the uncompromising visage of Inspector McGivens. Before he could remonstrate, two policemen shoved him into a patrol wagon alongside Little Clancy, Billings and Rat-line Sam. The wagon growled into low, skidded around a corner and headed for the city jail.

AFTER spending the entire next day in a stuffy cell alongside the Zymanski brothers, Tug Raffin was extremely vexed. It did not improve his disposition to see Inspector McGivens come lumbering down the corridor grinning cheerfully. "You men are free

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now," said the inspector, as a turnkey clanked the cell door open. "We thought you were part of the Begelman mob; but Mr. Mandragon explained everything."

"Phooey on him!" snorted the Zymanskis, embittered by their week in jail. "He should be fed to cats."

Upon reaching the Bilge and Binnacles clubroom, they discovered Joe Lemon reclining on a cot, surrounded by newspapers. "Look here," said Joe Lemon acidly. "Mandragon is on every front page, and we don't even get honorable mention."

"That's because we're his silent partners," said Little Clancy. "We have manufactured him out of nothing—like in that movie, *Frankensteen.*"

"Hello, men."

A new Sidney Mandragon entered the room. He wore a black and white striped suit that resembled zebra hide and a snap-brim hat with a red feather.

Little Clancy eyed the clothes admiringly. "Where'd you get the outfit?"

"I bought it with part of the thousand dollars reward," said Mandragon.

"How come?" inquired Tug. "You look very nifty for a guy who wants to commit suicide."

"Suicide?" Mandragon cocked his head thoughtfully. "Ah, yes. That was when I was disappointed in love. Things are different now, for since this morning I am a married man. Gentlemen, I want you to meet my bride, the former Lily Dingle!"

She came in looking very pleased with herself and carrying a fur muff. "Snookie has told me so much about you all," she said, glancing at Tug.

"That's her pet name for me," Mandragon confided. "Snookie."

"We ain't interested in love," snarled Little Clancy rudely. "What about the dough?"

"The sugar company has given us a two weeks' sea voyage on one of their vessels," said Mandragon, ignoring the question. "We're leaving on our honeymoon at once. The boat sails from Pier Fifty-nine in an hour."

"The dough," repeated Little Clancy clenching his fists. "It belongs to us."

Lily paced the length of the room, measuring the distance aloud. "We can put a sofa here," she mused, "and wall the end of the room off for a kitchen."

"What's she mumblin' about?" said Joe Lemon.

"I forgot to tell you," said Mandragon. "During the past week I have grown very fond of this cozy room. Lily and I are going to set up light housekeeping here when we get back."

"You can't do it," said Tug sharply. "This place belongs to the Bilge and Binaacles."

"It belongs to Mr. Karamoz," corrected Mandragon. "Mr. Karamoz was most grateful because single-handed I got rid of his creditor, Jake Begelman. He's given me this room—rent free."

"Let me at him!" howled Little Clancy. "The doublecrosser—"

"No rough stuff," Tug cut in, seizing Little Clancy by the collar. "We tried to take advantage of Mandragon, and he has turned the tables on us. We must show him that we are good sports."

"Yess," added the Zymanskis. "We should see him off at the docks."

"Thank you," said Mandragon importantly. "I will let you carry our luggage."

THEY all walked down Fort Street together, the Bilge and Binnacles straggling behind unhappily. A stubby black freight boat was moored at one side of Pier Fifty-nine, along with several smaller craft. The Zymanskis

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carried the suitcases aboard, and Mandragon paused at the plank to give Tug's hand a fishy grasp. "I have a confession to make," he whispered. "I never did intend to commit suicide."

"I suspected it from the first," said Tug. "When I grabbed you on the ledge, you were scared stiff."

"The only way I could get Lily back was to become famous and successful," said Mandragon. "An astrologer told me that the way to be successful was to make everybody look up to you. So I climbed out on the ledge of that building."

"And we played right into your hand," added Tug. "We took all the risks, and you get all the credit. You even got our clubroom."

"Ho, ho!" chuckled Mandragon. It was the first time Tug had ever seen him laugh, and he found it rather repulsive. "I guess I am smarter than you thought."

In a few minutes the plank hinged up, hawser lines slackened, and the ship's whistle emitted a mournful blast.

"There goes our fortune," Joe Lemon remarked dourly.

"It's losin' the clubroom that I'm sore about," said Billings.

"Aye," nodded Rat-line Sam. "What'll we do now?"

There seemed to be no answer to that one, so they just stood on the dock looking sad. They could see the Mandragons waving from the vessel's poop deck, but no one felt like waving back. Suddenly a large, black-whiskered man with an officer's cap edged Sidney Mandragon aside and raised a clenched fist shoreward.

"*Dosvedanya, Tovarich!*" he called in a booming voice.

"What's that guy sayin'?" inquired Little Clancy.

"I don't know," replied Tug. "It's something Russian."

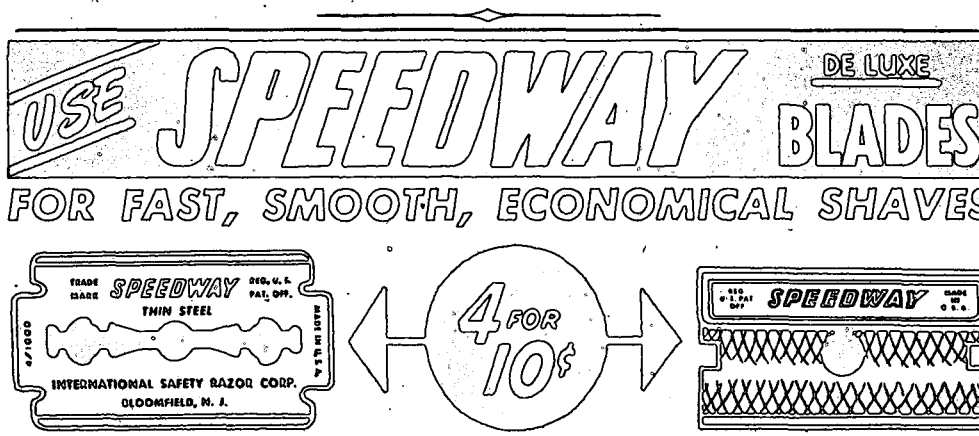
"Yess," said one of the Zymanskis, pulling a bottle from his coat. "That iss our pal, Captain Kassivitsky. He just giffed us this quart uff vodka."

"You put 'em on the wrong ship!" exclaimed Little Clancy happily. "They're bound for Valdivostok!"

"Then they won't be back for a year at least," said Joe Lemon. "That burg is froze up all winter."

"The guy who takes advantage of others always gets it in the end," said Tug Raffin sagely. "I hope you birds will profit by this experience."

The Bilge and Binnacles nodded complete approval, and they all went back to the clubroom to drink the captain's vodka.



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MEN of DARING
by Stookie Allen
Pioneer of the Air Lanes
FOLLOWING SERVICE AS A WARTIME AVIATOR, JEAN MERMOZ TURNED TO THE PIONEERING OF FAR-FLUNG FRENCH AIR TRANSPORT ROUTES. THE WORLD'S LUCKIEST FLYER, BROTHER PILOTS CALLED HIM, BECAUSE OF HIS MIRACULOUS ESCAPES FROM LANDINGS IN INACCESSIBLE PLACES.
ON HIS FIRST CROSSING OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC HE WAS FORCED DOWN AND RODE OUT A FIERCE GALE UNTIL RESCUED BY A PASSING STEAMER.
Jean MERMOZ
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SAHARA HIS MOTOR WENT DEAD; HE WAS CAPTURED BY MOORS, WHO COULDN'T DECIDE HOW TO KILL HIM, AND SOLD HIM TO THE SULTAN OF TARAUDANT AS A SLAVE. RANSOMED FOR $2,500, HE WENT RIGHT BACK FOR MORE.
CHARTING A ROUTE OVER THE 20,000-FOOT ANDES IN A PLANE WITH A 16,000-FOOT CEILING, MERMOZ AND HIS MECHANIC WERE MAROONED ON A SHEER PLATEAU. AFTER TWO DAYS WORK THEY PUSHED THE SHIP OVER THE EDGE AND GLIDED TO SAFETY.
MERMOZ FLEW THE AFRICA-BRAZIL MAIL ROUTE FOR 12 YEARS UNTIL ONE DAY IN 1936 HIS RADIO TOLD OF MOTOR TROUBLE—THEN SILENCE. HIS LUCK HAD RUN OUT. THE SEA HAD CLAIMED HIM AT LAST!

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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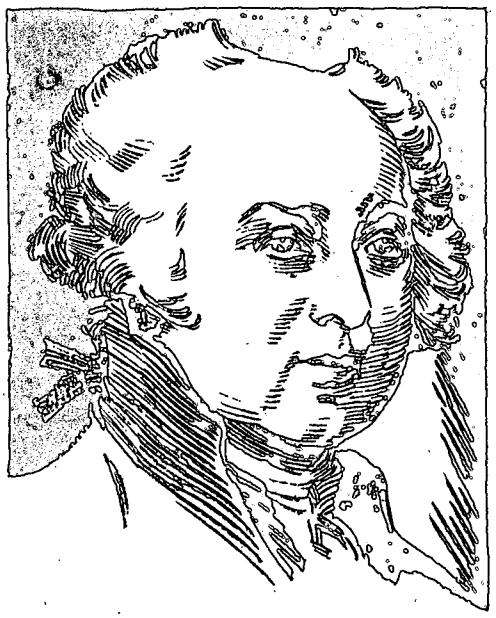

Then Placid John Adams

This is the second in a series of distinguished novelets chronicling Imaginary Moments in the lives of America's Presidents . . . the moments that never happened, but might have, moments in which the destiny of our country was decided

Novelet

He was our second president, and he wasn't so placid at the outset. Here's the merry account of his lively journey toward serenity, as well as the possible explanation of what the fiery little statesman was up to when he dropped out of sight for three months. . . .

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "The Man Who Wouldn't Be King," "Remember Tomorrow," etc.

I

BACK when schoolboys used to recite their lessons instead of dodge them, the classrooms chanted a poem that went something like this:

Washington first of the presidents stands,
Then placid John Adams the country commands—

. Then Jefferson something on the "glorious score" and masterful Madison "comes number four," and so on down the famous list in fine chronological order, its purpose calculated to make young Americans remember their Presidents.

It is a stirring epic, and its patriotic theme might well be learned in these forgetful times, but it seems the author was more poet than historian. What in the world did he mean by "placid John Adams?"

Placid John Adams?

I'd like to know that poet's conception of temperamental. John Adams was just about as placid as the boiling water that brewed the Boston Tea Party, and if he didn't boil outwardly a lot of the time, he boiled inwardly, and it wasn't any tempest in a teapot, either.

Certainly he wasn't placid in those pre-Revolutionary years when he and his cousin Sam worked their heads off to cook up resistance against England. Why, it was John who wrote most of the Declaration of Independence. It was

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And then began such a riot as few had ever seen, with John Adams right in the thick of it

John who got Washington appointed head of the army. It was John who rushed over to France to raise war loans and write treaties, and when he couldn't borrow money in Paris, he borrowed it from the Dutch—and no placid man ever borrowed any money from the Dutch.

Then after the War he was our first ambassador to England—no placid job, in a country still smarting from defeat. He came back to be our first Vice-president, and he wasn't placid then, no matter how you look at it. There was a cantankerous streak in John Adams all wool and a yard wide—he was too plain honest to be suave or tactful or serene. He didn't like playing second fiddle to anybody, even Washington, and he sulked about Washington's popularity, crabbing most of the time.

Politics isn't likely to bring out the smoother side of a man, and John Adams was only human. Even when elected our second President, he was miffed at being second. He thought the country had slighted him, electing him President as a compromise in the Federalist Party.

The government was in Philadelphia—they were just building the new capitol down on the Potomac—and he wrote letters complaining to his wife, Abigail, that he didn't like Philadelphia. He had no patience with Congress; he wrangled with his advisers; he mistrusted his cabinet.

He didn't get along with Jefferson, his Vice-president, and he didn't approve of Ben Franklin's morals.

Then he got into a violent quarrel

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with Hamilton (both men flinging insults in a way which did credit to neither); fired most of his cabinet officers; broke with the Federalists who'd elected him; exploded the X-Y-Z Affair, and split the country wide open politically.

Now don't think this is an attempt to belittle John Adams. He was a great patriot, a great statesman, and a great American. No man in the little Republic was better fitted to be Chief Executive. He came to the Presidency at a time of desperate need, and he steered the Ship of State through the treacherous international shoals as no man before and few since.

But he wasn't placid. Never!

He was proud and stubborn, and full of explosive emotions like all our early forefathers. Why, it's historical fact—maybe you never heard it—that John Adams got so mad at the way things were going one time when he was President that he walked right out of his office and let the nation run itself without him for three months!

Yes sir, John Adams walked out of his office, mad, and for three months he didn't come back. Can you imagine a President doing such a thing today? There hasn't been a temper to equal his in American History. Maybe you don't believe it, but you can find it in your history books. But what did he do during those three months absence when he let the nation go hang?

Did he go fishing in Maine or did he go on a spree? Did he rage off by himself in some cabin in the woods? If you care to make the research, you can probably find that out, too; so far, I haven't been able to find out (I haven't made the research) but I've been wondering.

Suppose he stayed there in town, in angry disguise. Suppose, disgusted with everything, he took a packet back to Europe. Suppose he crossed the Appalachians to hibernate with sensible Indians.

Or suppose—

JOHN ADAMS slammed the door behind him, and snatched his old tricorne from the hatrack in the hall, and stamped out of the building. He didn't see the guard who raised his musket in salute. He saw red.

Crossing a crowded square, he looked neither left nor right; his chin was thrust like a cobblestone block; his shoulders were puffed like a cat's; his lips were clamped as hard as galvanized iron.

John Adams had never been so mad.

He pretended not to hear the Negro who had run after him from the historic building—an old trusted messenger of the government who waved an important paper in his hand and called, "Mr. Adams! Mr. Adams!" He only quickened his stride, and the old Negro was lost in the shuffle.

John Adams walked blindly on. He was almost run down by a bucket brigade racing to a fire somewhere. Cartwheels missed his toes. Pedestrians jostled him. Nobody paid any attention to him—everyone was running to the fire—and that increased his dudgeon, despite the fact he didn't want to talk to anyone. Outraged, he walked faster than ever.

In fact, he walked right out of town.

He followed the main thoroughfare, and he walked right out of Philadelphia. He took the first turnpike he came to, and he walked along that. The pike was lively with horsemen, drays, coaches and ox-carts, and he swerved up a side road to avoid them. A teamster driving a dozen hogs to Trenton offered him a lift, but John Adams

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only snorted a splenetic, "Nah!" and the teamster went on, muttering, "Godfrey, what a crosspatch!"

Crosspatch was a strong term in those days, but it hardly did justice to the feelings of John Adams.

Besides being mad, he was aggrieved. He felt annoyed, infuriated, bitter and grossly insulted. Altogether he was in a fit of spleen. When had a man ever suffered such ingratitude? When had a man been as unappreciated? He'd devoted his whole career to his country, and what had he got? Peanuts!

They'd elected him President, but at the inauguration the applause had been for Washington. Everyone else got the honors; all he got was the work. And what a job!

National affairs in a muddle. The international situation a powder keg. A cabinet full of fools. All the headaches left over by Washington's administration. The Union appeared ready to fall to pieces at any minute, and nobody seemed willing to cooperate—Jefferson wanting this; Pinckney wanting that; that confounded Hamilton making trouble at every turn—surely President of the United States was the toughest job in all the world.

Not that he'd expected gratitude—the public was incapable of it!—the job was thankless, and he could have put up with that. He could have stood the hours of office work, mental strain, awful responsibility. Even the slanders of political opponents, the editorial jibes, the blame and criticism for everything that went wrong—all that he could stand.

Yes, he could even stand the intrigues and backbiting of Hamilton, who wanted to run the country. But when they paid you a measly twenty-five thousand a year and expected you to entertain in regal splendor—! When you were supposed to run a household like the Czar of Russia on such a pittance that you couldn't even afford to keep your wife in Philadelphia—! And then the Treasury Department won't give you expense-money for a coach and four—! Well, that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

No, the stingy Treasury had refused to pay his coach bill, and the ache that came to his legs as he stumped up the country road thinking about it didn't soothe him any. The more he walked, the hotter he got under the collar.

He'd scraped along in meager lodgings. His dining table was frugal. He'd sacrificed family life, leaving wife and comforts in the big wide house up in Braintree, Massachusetts. But when the President of the United States couldn't even afford a coach and four—John Adams was so preoccupied with this outrage, that he walked a lot farther than he intended, for instead of cooling his spleen the hike had only aggravated it, and now he was madder than ever.

BESIDES, the road had entered a deep, dark woods, and he wasn't quite sure where he was. Twilight was making, and he was hungry. He hurried back the way he'd come, but it didn't seem to get him any nearer Philadelphia—the forest deepened and the twilight darkened—he wasn't sure of his way.

Well, he consulted his great silver watch—half an inch thick, it was, with a chain stout enough to anchor a twenty-gun frigate—it was later than he'd thought. He decided to find an inn and have his supper, but he couldn't find an inn.

No, there didn't seem to be any hostelries by the road, or any farm-

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houses or woodcutters' cottages or log cabins, either. Night darkened the forest, and a big yellow moon shouldered up over the trees.

The road was a ribbon of moonlight, but there weren't any road signs to direct him back to town. There was just this brown, moonlit road through the forest, and John Adams had to keep on walking.

Jehu! he felt as if he'd walked a thousand miles.

Well, at last he came to a stile, and he sat down, mighty hungry, thirsty and wornout. His nose was sunburned, the silver buckles hurt on his shoes, the calves of his legs were cramping, and he was lost.

That was a pretty situation, wasn't it? The President of the United States lost in his own country, sitting supperless on a stile!

It seemed to John Adams as if America had always treated him like that, and when he thought of the injustice that had set him out walking in the first place, he was fit to be tied. By heaven! he wouldn't put up much longer with such treatment. For two cents he'd throw over this job of President!

A pang of appetite filled him with such a yearning for a good side of beef and a bottle of porter that he groaned aloud. Memory of his wife's cooking and the big comfortable house up in Braintree increased his bitterness. Why had he been such a fool as to enter public life? Time and again he'd wanted to get out of it, but he'd persevered for the sake of his country. This was the reward! Lost and hungry on a lonely road. He groaned again.

Then he sat bolt upright. That groan might have been a prayer, from the way it was answered. It was answered by a whiff of bacon—an aroma of frying bacon that wafted out of the forest on a little nocturnal zephyr and circled his nostrils with a teasing insistence that made his head swim.

It was accompanied by a fragrance of coffee that set his mouth a-water. Jumping up from the stile, he probed the nearer thickets with famished eyes, sniffing furiously.

He was on the point of bellowing to know its source when from the timber at his left the forest's stillness was startled by a song. "The Girl I Left Behind Me!" No nightingale, that, but a good Yankee-nasal tenor, and John Adams, himself a good Yankee, went into the forest on the bound.

He picked up a hickory staff on the way—you never could tell, this singer might be a freebooter, an army deserter, or (perish the thought) a vagrant Federalist, and the President of the United States couldn't be too careful. But the bacon whiffs got the better of him.

In his haste he stumbled over a root. Head over teacup, he went somersaulting down into a glen. There was a brook and a campfire and a big oak tree and a long, lean man with a frying pan in his hand.

And that's how John Adams met a tinker.

II

YES, the man was a tinker, and he and John Adams got along fine. Naturally he wanted to know who John Adams was, and when John Adams said cautiously, "A traveler who's lost his way," he invited John Adams to sit right down and have vittles.

His eyes were as honest blue as John Adams' own, so John Adams knew he wasn't any freebooter or politician. Before you could say Jack Sprat, John

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Adams consumed five cups of coffee and fifteen slabs of bacon. The banquet was washed down by a jug of dandelion wine, and John Adams reckoned it was the best bang-up meal he'd ever tasted.

Now Yankees aren't liable to say much at first acquaintance, and John Adams said less. The tinker didn't say more. He gave John Adams some of the blackest burleigh you've ever seen, and for the next hour they sat with their backs against the tree, just nodding and smoking and spitting into the fire.

Finally the tinker allowed that his name was Caleb Dingman, and, odd enough, he'd got lost in the forest, too. He pointed at his big canvas tinker's pack under the tree, and declared he'd pretty well traveled all over New England, but this stretch of territory was new to him. He said he was a down-East man.

John Adams warmed to him for that, especially when Caleb said he'd fit in the Battle of Lexington and was the man who'd held Paul Revere's horse.

John Adams owned up that he, himself, was from Boston way. He said his name was Rotundity, wryly using a name that Izard had dubbed him, and he declared that he was a lawyer, which he was, and that he'd missed the Philadelphia turnpike, which he had.

Well, they sat there thinking their own thoughts again, listening to the leaves and the fire. An owl hooted, friendly in the trees, and the night was just right for a camp.

John Adams found himself envying his companion's healthy tan and the easy relaxation of gypsy life. Caleb, sideways, was secretly admiring John Adams' city clothes and gentlemanly air.

"Funny," he said at last, "I missed the Philadelphia turnpike, myself." He allowed to John Adams as how he was on his way to the capitol to see the President.

"The President?" John Adams demanded, suspicious. "What do you want to see the President for?"

Practically everybody wanted to see the President to complain about something or other; but Caleb Dingman just stared off into the trees.

"Jest want to see him, that's all. Like to git one good look at him up close."

"What do you want to see him up close for?" John Adams felt a twinge of alarm. Maybe this fellow wanted to assassinate him.

"Why, I jest want to see him," the tinker's eyes were bright. "I'd jest like to shake his hand. Seems to me bein' President of the United States is about the biggest position in the world today, take a pretty slick man to win it. This John Adams—Bonny Johnnie like we call him back home—I reckon he's a real humdinger. Got about the best job in creation, and I'd jest like to congratulate him for gettin' it."

"Maybe it's not such a good job," said John Adams, caustic. "Might be a tinker's job is better."

"A TINKER'S—?" Caleb stared. "Say, a tinker does nothin' but work. Sunup to sundown, and then nowhere to sleep but under a tree. They say the President sleeps in a big feather bed, all curtained with American flags."

"Maybe he doesn't get much fresh air," growled John Adams, "and urgent messengers keep waking him up at night."

"Well, at least that'd be exciting, signing Declarations of War and the like of that. 'Tain't boresome like mending dishpans. No work to it,

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either. The President jest takes out his big gold pen an' signs."

"Maybe his hand shakes from the responsibility, Caleb. Maybe signing Declarations gets on his nerves."

"Not on the President's," Caleb shook his head. "It's common men like me got nerves. Times hard, an' never knowin' where my next penny's comin' from. Think of the President's salary!"

"And think of his expenses," John Adams thought.

"Laborin' with tools gits tiresome," Caleb said.

"But builds healthy muscle," John Adams thought.

"And the President don't git into rows," Caleb said.

"No," John Adams thought, thinking of Alexander Hamilton.

"He don't git into jams," Caleb pointed out ruefully, "like the one I got into in a place I'm in recently. I'm mendin' a spinnin' wheel for a woman, an' she's bendin' over to help me. Parson passes the window, an' goes tells her husband he seen me give her a kiss. I hear he's comin' with a gun, I do, an' I have to git. Fixin' clocks an' pumps an' dishpans, you git into jams. President wouldn't never git into such a scandal."

"Never," John Adams thought grimly, thinking of scurrilous mud-slinging political campaigns.

"Nobody'd dare take a shot at the President," the tinker went on in an awed tone. "Biggest job in creation, takes a mighty big man to hold it down. They say he's seven or eight feet tall at least, magnificent to behold. All covered over with glitterin' medals an' decorations like to make the kings of England and France look like tramps. I've heard he wears a long blue coat an' a weskit all spangled with stars, an' red and white striped pants.

"They say he lives in a palace all full of gold eagles, an' the band plays marches all the time, an' most of the day he jest sets around readin' the Constitution an' tellin' 'bassadors from Europe where to head in. They say he goes out in an imperial satin-lined coach pulled by thirteen horses for the Thirteen States. It sure must be splendid"—Caleb's eyes were shining—"and I'd sure like to see him."

"So would I," said John Adams, choking on that "coach" and "thirteen horses" as if he'd swallowed a chicken bone. "So that's what they say about the President of the United States."

"Heard it from a sojer who said he'd seed him," Caleb nodded. "Wisht I had all those fine clothes an' wages an' eddication an' gentlemanly ways. Sell out my tinker's trade to be President any time."

Well, you know what John Adams was thinking as well as I do, and it didn't take him long to make up his mind. He was thinking how nice it must be to travel around the country doing odd jobs for pretty housewives. How easy to retire at sunset and not be kicked out of bed by diplomatic nightmares. This forest was luxury compared to the noise of Philadelphia; the *tonk* of a tinker's hammer would be music compared to the yells of Congress.

Right then John Adams made one of the most decisive decisions of his life. "Caleb, did you mean that, that you'd sell your tinker's outfit?"

"'Most give it, I would, to the first customer as would buy."

"How much?" John Adams poked a finger at the tinker's pack.

"Thirty dollars," said Caleb, recovering from surprise.

"Twenty," John Adams offered. "Sound American money."

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"Twenty-nine an' she's yours," said the tinker, eyes bulging at John Adams' pocketbook.

Well, they bargained and bickered as Yankees will; in the end John Adams bought the tinker's kit for twenty-three dollars with his silver shoe buckles thrown in. Both went to sleep, each sure he had the best of the bargain.

In the morning John Adams shook the tinker's horny hand, and the tinker shook John Adams' official one; wishing each other God speed, they set out on separate ways—Caleb well pleased with the unexpected wealth that was going to make him a gentleman and take him to Philadelphia to see the President—John Adams right contented because at last (he'd always wanted to do it) he'd got out of public life.

III

SO John Adams went tinkering around the country, and for the first couple of weeks he had a wonderful time. Fresh air and sunshine did him a lot of good, and he reflected there was nothing like the gypsy life. It was fun to stop at some farmhouse or cabin and fix up the cookpots and churns. By heaven! it was easier than mending Foreign Relations and fixing up Bills and Acts.

It was good to turn in at night and not have some secretary banging on his door. Or not have his breakfast ruined by the latest European crisis. What a relief not to have to face Congress in the afternoon or have to deal with that knave, Alexander Hamilton. No grafting diplomats—no nagging politicians—it seemed to John Adams he was free since the first time he'd fought for Liberty.

He grinned, wondering what they'd said when he hadn't come back; and he hadn't grinned in so long that it cracked the corners of his mouth.

Those lumpheaded statesmen would be in a panic. He could just imagine the furore his absence would make. The idea amused John Adams—couriers running their legs off—politicians hunting him—dispatch riders riding posthaste—maybe they'd toll the Liberty Bell. Yes, they'd read proclamations. Call out the army. Summon all the big men of the nation. Oh, plenty of those big men had said they didn't want him. Maybe they'd appreciate him, now he wasn't there.

He didn't worry about his wife worrying about him. Word of his absence wouldn't reach Braintree for days—the postal service was slow—there wouldn't be headlines in the Boston papers, because newspapers didn't have headlines in those days, and without telephones, telegraphs or radios they didn't have much news.

He figured he could walk to Braintree before the news got there, and he aimed his steps in that general direction. He just didn't worry about anything; it was great not to have any worries. All his life he'd worried about the country, but now, so far as he was concerned, they could go fly Ben Franklin's kite.

At first he was on the lookout for scouts who might be hunting him, but nobody bothered him at all. The road was little traveled. The farmers and woodcutters he encountered were simple folk who wouldn't have been able to recognize him from such pictures as were in circulation. That tinker's pack was enough for a disguise.

He reflected how easy it was to lead a quiet, everyday life, and he wondered why the devil he'd wanted to be President in the first place.

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But then he ran into rain.

The open road turned into a slough. He couldn't sleep at night in soggy woods, and stopping at inns cost too much money. He fell into a bog and couldn't get dry—fires were hard to start with flint and tinder—he began to wonder about the gypsy life. And when he burned his fingers on the soldering iron and cut his thumb on the tinshears, he began to wonder about tinkering.

It seemed there were some angles to it he hadn't suspected. A tinker was a man who did most everything in general, and John Adams walked into a neighborhood where his predecessor, Caleb, had done some pretty general tinkering. He might've been warned by Caleb's singing "The Girl I Left Behind Me", but he'd forgotten the story about the pretty wife and the spinning wheel.

Pack on back, he trudged into this pleasant hamlet, and next thing he knew, it wasn't so pleasant. A flintlock banged. Hot lead whistled over his head. Turning, John Adams saw a big red-whiskered man charging at him with a musket. It didn't take him long to recognize an outraged husband.

THIS worthy, in turn, recognized the tinker's pack even if he didn't recognize the tinker. Perhaps he was out to exterminate the profession. Bullets began to fly like the Battle of Bunker Hill, and John Adams shed his pack and considerable of his dignity in a retreat that isn't in the history books.

He lost his tricorne hat in the race, and he lost his desire to tinker. When friend husband caught him on a covered bridge at hamlet's edge, John Adams might have lost his life, too, if he hadn't been a first class diplomat.

Arguing out of that triangle took a masterpiece of diplomacy—talk about the X-Y-Z Affair! But to show you what a super-diplomat John Adams was, he not only saved his skin, but ended up by selling his tinker's pack to the husband and wangling a dinner invitation besides. He sold the kit for two dollars more than he'd paid for it; the wife in the case patched the bullet hole in his pocket, and John Adams went on, a little relieved to be through with tinkering.

Well, he fell in with a cooper.

Walking into New Jersey—he knew it was New Jersey from the mosquitoes—he reckoned he'd buy a horse. He'd raised a corn, and mosquitoes heckled him almost as much as Congressmen, and Massachusetts was still a long way off. But horses at the time were scarce—the older generation had been killed off by the Revolutionary War—a good horse cost about the price of a car today, and John Adams didn't want some old nag.

In Morristown there was a horse fair with some pretty good buys, but John Adams found out they wouldn't take his money. He got a lesson in finance there in Jersey.

American banks were in an uproar in those days—in some states paper money wasn't worth a Continental—others issued their own currency—the money he'd got in Pennsylvania wasn't any good in Morristown. Hamilton had been monkeying with the Treasury again; instead of a coach and four, John Adams couldn't even buy a nag.

That made him hopping mad, and hopping hurt his corn. He could've written to Philadelphia for his back salary, but that meant declaring his whereabouts, and he was as stubborn a man as was ever elected to the Presidency. Thought they could make him walk, did they? Well, he'd raised his

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last corn in America, declared John Adams.

Across the street from the horse fair was a cooper's shop, and John Adams made a deal with the cooper. He said he could learn the craft in half an hour, and he offered to make barrels for a penny a barrel. You must make a heap of barrels to earn enough to buy a horse, but work never fazed John Adams. He was mad enough to trade his kingdom for a horse, and he told himself that whatever he did would be an easier job than President.

So John Adams tried his hand at coopering.

He was quick with his head, John Adams, and he mastered easily the tricks with jointer, truss hoops, krisset stove and champering knife. All the other tools of that honorable and ancient craft came likely to his hand, and I warrant there wasn't such a cooper anywhere in America at the time. You can bet he made the shavings fly!

Yes sir, for three weeks he made barrels just as fast as his boss could hand him the staves, for every time he pounded a nail-head he pretended it was Alexander Hamilton's. He made flour barrels and potato barrels, molasses barrels and cracker barrels; but mostly he made cider barrels, the season being ripe for Jersey Lightning.

Only rolling out the barrel wasn't necessarily a barrel of fun, as John Adams found out. The day started at five and ended at ten—at night. Seventeen hours wasn't extraordinary in those days, except it didn't allow much time for recreation. The shop was hot and dark, and there weren't any inspectors to check up on ventilation. Union wages were unheard of. So was workmen's compensation. The boss was a mean man full of cuss words and applejack, and in half a week's time John Adams wanted to strike.

He scorched his hands on the krisset, pinched his fingers in the hoops, hammered his sore thumb, and wanted to strike his employer on the nose. Holding his temper choked him half to death. But at the end of three weeks he had his money for a horse, and it didn't take him long to get out of Morristown.

HE WAS happier to be through with coopering than he had been with tinkering, and he figured he'd clip up to Boston and try his hand at something else. Then he hadn't gone far before he found out *he'd* been clipped. That poet who called him placid should've seen his face when he topped a hill in the Orange Mountains and the engine went dead.

Did that make John Adams mad! If your engine goes dead in the Orange Mountains today you can call up a service station and put in a fresh sparkplug, but back in the 1790's there weren't any service stations, and you can't put a fresh sparkplug in a dead horse.

Bonny Johnnie had a conniption. It almost killed him to think how hard he'd worked to pay for that dead horse. He wanted to go back and have that horse-trader arrested for treason against the President of the United States under the Alien and Sedition Act. Then he remembered he couldn't invoke the Act under the circumstances, and he called that chiseling horse-trader all the names he'd been saving up for Hamilton.

It was a conspiracy, that's what it was. As if the whole country was trying to make him walk! You can see John Adams vowing not to walk another foot; he set his jaw like granite,

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and he sat down at the side of that mountain road like a statue. That wasn't liable to get you very far on the mountain roads of Jersey in those days. A couple of horsemen went by, and a pretty milkmaid on an ox, then for the next thirty hours John Adams saw nothing but rabbits. Likely his bones would be sitting there yet, if it hadn't been for the doctor.

Just at dusk of the third day John Adams sighted a wagon toiling uphill —a most extraordinary wagon. It was pulled by a team of brown mules wearing straw hats like a pair of old ladies on their way to church; tethered to one side lumbered a cinnamon bear; the roof was decked with flags and bunting. Signs proclaimed, *Usnea For Asthma!* and bold lettering over the driver's seat announced, *The Wizard of Physic!*

In case you might misunderstand, this introduced a physician, and the physician in this case was a great, jovial fat man, big as a lard tub, dressed in buckskin and Indian feathers, for all the world Humpty Dumpty in the guise of a Choctaw chief. Such an equipage on a road today would send a hitch-hiker running for his reason, but John Adams stubbornly stood his ground with cocked thumb, and the physician roared at him to know his trouble.

"Is it rickets or quinzy that stands you there, sir—water of the brain or knee? Name your ailment, stranger; I've the answer at once, for there's nothing I can't cure with my vast store of medical wonders."

John Adams pointed at his horse; the Wizard had to confess that death was the one thing he couldn't cure. "But I've a remedy for corns," he boomed, moving over on the driver's seat. "The best in the world—a compound of mules and wagon-wheels. So climb aboard, sir, and mind the bear! Join a master of medicine on his way to the relief of a suffering mankind!"

IV

JOHN ADAMS accepted the invitation with alacrity. The doctor needed an assistant, and he accepted the job with alacrity, too. It seemed the physician's assistant had died on the road the night before, and the Wizard assured J.A. he could learn all there was to know about medicine in an hour.

Perhaps this was true. Those days, there wasn't much known about medicine. Doctoring was somewhat a matter of luck—salts and bleeding were in general favor, while other prescriptions depended largely on the doctor's imagination and the signs of the Zodiac —the patient who survived such treatment could know himself Fortune's darling.

The Wizard admitted medicine was in its experimental stage, but neglected to tell John Adams that his late assistant had died in one of the experiments, and that portions of the hapless medical student were at that moment under the driver's seat in bottles—while other portions accompanied the party in the digestive tracts of the bear.

Unaware of these hazards, John Adams went in for medicine with all his heart. He'd always wanted to relieve suffering mankind; medicine, he reflected, was far more to the point than politics; while the fees made a President's salary look sick. Fifteen dollars just for sawing off a leg!

"And everybody," the Wizard assured him, "has two legs!"

Well, he got along with the doctor fine. The Wizard taught him the lat-

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est cures, and the Wizard had them all. He showed John Adams beozar stones for the headache and mummy-dust for the plague. He revealed the healing formula of the Abacadabra.

Salves, plasters, leeches for bleeding, cat's blood to cure nightmares—the Wizard's stock was enormous. He was gay as well as learned, was the Wizard; he chuckled and poked John Adams in the ribs, winking and beaming and nodding his headdress of Indian feathers as he talked.

It was a lot more interesting than tinkering or coopering; certainly it was a higher-minded service than being President; John Adams wondered why he hadn't gone into medicine before.

John Adams wasn't long in passing his medical course. He learned the influence of the stars on one's health; how to use Doctor Perkins' tractors for the "jolly nose"; where to bag a corpse that could furnish usnea.

Doctor Perkins' tractors? One of the medical wonders of the period—a pair of silver tweezers charged with electricity, guaranteed to cure that common complaint "jolly nose" which is just as common today, but known as "rum blossom" and treated somewhat differently. As for usnea, that was moss scraped from the skull of a dead criminal; the standard Pharmacopeia and our forefathers recommended it for asthma—John Adams, himself, smeared it on his chest—if you don't believe it, look it up in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

And before you go jeering at our forefathers, remember the present market in patent medicine.

Anyway, John and the Wizard did a thriving business dispensing nostrums. After all, healing is largely a matter of faith. They sold quantities of usnea in the Jersey villages, and the Wizard had no trouble getting testimonials.

Villages in those days didn't have drug stores. Few of them had doctors. Your average villager dosed his own ailment while his wife advised the parson to keep Friday open for the funeral. The average person died early in early America, which gives you an idea of how stubborn John Adams was.

He died when he was ninety.

ENTERING a village, the Wizard would park his wagon in the market place. The bear danced. John Adams distributed cures through the crowd while the Wizard spieled. It was a paying business. There was something the matter with nearly everybody. For example, nearly all of our forefathers were pitted with smallpox. The Wizard sold a salve guaranteed to erase the pits.

Sometimes surgery was called for, and John Adams assisted at some unusual operations. In one town, there was a man with a terrific pain in his left side. The Wizard advised salts, a mustard plaster, sulphur and molasses and a hot bath. When the patient worsened he was bled. John Adams' duty was to tie the raving man to the bedpost, and afterward inform the wife she was a widow.

Quite as colorful was a leg amputation in which the patient—a village blacksmith—refused to lie still while the Wizard sawed. Ten men were required to hold the unruly smith. A fiddler, brought in as an anaesthetic (music being the forerunner of ether), was himself knocked cold. The Wizard received a black eye for his pains, and in the scuffle John Adams almost lost his own leg.

But they came off, triumphant, with the blacksmith's limb; if the patient

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died afterward, at least the operation was a partial success.

In the main, John Adams preferred medicaments. He enjoyed mixing emulsions, stewing herbs, cooking up simples and brewing the Wizard's remedies. Not far from Newark Village they found a dead criminal in a crossroads gallows. They barbered this cadaver of its skull-moss, and with a new supply of asthma-cure they set out for New York.

Now the city toward which our physicians were traveling was the New York of the 1790's, not the New York of 1939. Manhattan began down by the Battery, which was an island, and petered out somewhere near the Woolworth Building, then an elm tree. Little sailing ships hugged the riverfront docks. The streets were paved with cobblestones. Horsemen cantered in the lanes, and dandies smoked clay pipes in Fraunce's Tavern or exercised on Bowling Green.

Sanitation consisted of a file of slaves which trotted through the mists of early morning with buckets on black shoulders. Ladies went calling in sedan chairs, handkerchiefs to noses. New York danced the minuet and took snuff and resembled a cluster of those toy cardboard houses you used to play with as a child. It was little and quaint, and the houses were full of candlesticks and early American antiques.

But in some respects the city was same as today. Tough and shrewd and cosmopolitan, it thought itself ultra-modern. Then as now, its New Yorkers regarded the world with a wise, hard, slightly cynical eye.

OUR man, Adams, was aware of this eye. He was aware of it when the medicine show opened up in Maiden Lane. First night audiences are always hard to play to, and John Adams had seen that eye before from a platform during an election campaign.

He tried to warn the Wizard with a signal, but the Wizard refused to notice it. Trouble came from that glib word "guaranteed". If you can find that on a patent medicine today, you can sue the maker for a trip to Europe on the *Normandy*—our modern medicine wizards are mighty careful about guaranteeing anything. But the Wizard of Physic was not as circumspect. With the naive faith of the spellbinder, convinced by his own verbosity, he offered his cures as sure-fire.

"Usnea for asthma! And I guarantee, good people of New York, it will cure you of almost anything—!"

Which would have been all right, if the Wizard, himself, had not been at the time asthmatic. Unfortunately there were a lot of horses around, and the Wizard was allergic to horses. Just at the line, "My assistant will now pass among you with the bottles!" he emitted a terrific wheeze.

You could pull a wheeze in Jersey, then as now, but you couldn't and can't get away with that stuff in New York.

Some skeptic hollered, "Fraud!" There were cries of, "Quack!", "Knave!", "Villain!", "Rogue!" and "Rascal!" A voice roared, "Make him take his own medicine!"

The wagon was overturned, crashing. Someone cut loose the bear. The uproar was worse than the fight in Congress over the Alien and Sedition Act. A faint disillusionment in doctoring came to John Adams.

He opened his mouth to call out the Army; then remembered he couldn't call out the Army. It was a tough situation, with fists, clubs and bear-claws flying about his head. Let someone

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knock him flat and find out he was President! The President of the United States in a New York Street brawl! What Franklin's journals couldn't do with that!

Well, there was nothing for it but to cut and run, so John Adams cut and ran. Fifty strong boys were pinning the Wizard to the cobbles, pouring salts, nostrums and panaceas down his gagging throat—you'd have run, yourself, to escape that.

The bear joined the chase, but after an hour's sprinting John Adams discouraged his pursuers, and, breathless, somewhat disconsolate, made his way to Fraunce's Tavern.

Now a less stubborn man might have thrown up the sponge, but a less stubborn man wouldn't have chucked the Presidency to begin with.

Alone in a corner of the tap room, John Adams told himself he wasn't going to give up like some weakling. If doctoring was too strenuous, he could do something else, but whatever he did, by Godfrey! it was better than being President.

That no one in New York recognized him hardened his resolve. Nobody talked about him, either. There was a gilt-framed chromo of George Washington on the tavern wall, and plenty of gossip in the pipesmoke, all of which ignored John Adams.

He saw what had happened. The government wasn't going to let the public know he'd gone A.W.O.L. There was a Depression on after the Revolutionary War, and the leaders were afraid the news would start a panic.

Jefferson was keeping it a secret. Hamilton was probably gloating. Well, they couldn't do that to John Adams. He'd show them!

He got himself a job as a journeyman printer, figuring if Franklin could make a fortune at it, so could he. He smudged his hands, and the ink-smell made him sick, and he didn't have the temperament for typesetting.

The end came when he had to set up an editorial pamphlet accusing him—John Adams!—of being a monarchist, a grafter, a charlatan politician and a danger to the country. John Adams blew up with a bang that completely wrecked the printer's shop. Like this. *Bang!*

He tore up the copy and flung sticks of type. Kicked over the press, punched the editor in the nose, broke a window. Once more he found himself leading a mob, and the race he'd run to escape the purge was nothing to that dash through the forests of Central Park. 'An Adams man! An Adams!" They came baying after him like bloodhounds. Some of his pursuers he recognized as members of the Essex Junto, part of Hamilton's machine—if he ever got back into politics how he'd pay those scoundrels off!

Only he wasn't going back into politics, by Godfrey! not if he had to retire in Canada. They might have chased him that far, too, if a circuit rider hadn't saved him up near Harlem Heights.

You know, of course, what a circuit rider was. Well, this was one of those big, black-bearded preachers with a Bible in one hand and a whisky jug in the other, and when he saw John Adams come haring up the trail hard-pressed, he offered him the rumble seat on his nag.

V

IT WOULD take too long to go into John Adams' decision to enter the ministry; possibly you see the connection. Circuit riders ranged the country

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far and wide; the Reverend Joshua Gunn was en route to Boston; John Adams went along as assistant pastor.

Two men on a horse, they trotted through the forest discussing rye and Deuteronomy. The Reverend Gunn was an authority on the one hand, whereas John Adams knew considerable Deuteronomy. Those were the days when people quoted reams of Scripture, and John Adams was no mean student of theology. The Reverend Gunn was delighted to meet up with so scholarly a theologian, and John Adams thought at last he'd found his calling.

Life was pleasant, idling up the Post Road on horseback, taking nips of whisky and religion as they went along. Everything went well until Sunday. Then, in a maple-shadowed, sleepy New England village, the circuit rider asked his assistant pastor to preach.

Well, it was an idyllic setting. Sunlight sprinkling down through arched foliage. Villagers standing bareheaded in Sabbath array. John Adams prepared his sermon in two shakes of a lamb's tail, and he made a mighty impressive-looking preacher.

"Today's text is, Brethren and Sistern—'A prophet is without honor in his own country.' "

Amen. The congregation droning politely. The Reverend Gunn beaming benevolently, retiring with worshipful jug behind shady tree. John Adams' great voice rolling on, "There is much in the Gospel, Brethren and Sistern, that applies to us today. Galilee was not so different from America, even if its people did wear cloaks and sandals. Like us, those people yearned for Liberty. Like us they strove for Freedom from oppression—!"

Amen, again, except this sounded more like politics than religion.

"Then a great leader came among them—a man who wasn't appreciated —a lowly carpenter—"

What was that? Behind the tree, the Reverend Gunn pricked up uneasy ears.

"Yes, he was a carpenter, Brethren and Sistern, and people didn't appreciate his ideas. For instance, he wanted to drive the money-changers from the temple. He just didn't think that money and godliness could mix. I tell you, there are those in his country today who could learn that lesson. There's high men in our government—one in particular—who ought to read the Good Book. Finance seems to've become more important than Liberty, but this carpenter didn't approve of amassing wealth. He thought wisdom was better than rubies. He said it was harder for a rich man to get into Heaven than for a camel to get through a needle's eye—!"

Rich men? Camels? The Reverend Joshua Gunn dropped his whisky jug and emerged from retirement with open mouth. A voice from the congregation shrilled, "Stick to religion, Preacher; it's a sermon we want, not this everyday talk!" On the crowd's fringe an old gaffer hailed, "Aye, preach to us on Heaven and Hell!"

"And it's Heaven and Hell I'm preaching," John Adams retorted, flushed. "You think the Bible just applies to the Afterworld? It's for everyday life, I warrant, and the Hell it refers to is a condition right here on earth, not some mythical Perdition in the Hereafter!"

WELL, that was too much for the Reverend Gunn, same as it was too much for New England. Religion was a touchy subject in those days—then as now, the question of riches embarrassed the pious who had money. Too, there was a strong strain of Puritanism in

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New England, and they believed in their Hades, hook, line and sinker. But they preferred to think of it as in the Hereafter, for the obvious reason that if there's a Hell right here on earth you may catch it any day, but if it comes in the Hereafter, you can always change your mind the last minute and get out under the wire.

First thing John Adams knew, he had a red hot religious argument on his hands. Someone yelled he wasn't orthodox, and he allowed he wasn't or wanted to be.

"If you don't believe in Hell in the Hereafter," shrilled the banker who'd challenged him first, "where do *you* expect to go when you die?"

"Me?" John Adams reared up like an equestrian monument. "I'm never going to die!"

That raised Cain! You bet it did! The now thoroughly aroused circuit rider ordered his assistant pastor down from the pulpit. There were cries, "Heretic!" "Freethinker!" "Agnostic!"

John Adams flung back, "Pharisees!" and "Hypocrites!" Dogs barked. Swains swore. Farmers shook upraised fists. The Reverend Joshua Gunn went off with a bang, shattering the Sunday calm with, "Atheist!"

"Tar an' feather him!" someone roared. "Ride him outa town!"

Well, Bonny Johnnie blew up like a bombshell. Nobody was going to dunk him in hot tar. He'd always believed in the separation of Church and State, and it looked like the time to separate had arrived. Yes, sir, he abandoned the clergy a whole lot faster than he'd joined it; once more he found himself leading a howling mob.

Now you can read his free-thinking opinions in his diary, and some of the entries might have been made after that ministry episode.

Only Providence saved him that time. Providence, Rhode Island. In the city that had rescued Roger Williams from intolerance, he escaped down an alley; pawned his watch for the fare and fled on the first sailing packet for Boston.

Boston, 1790's was a lot like Little Old New York—full of stout Yankee Independence and sound American conviction. Those were the days when it had a pretty good library, and its streets were thronged with seafaring men and Unitarians.

The story goes that John Adams landed on the wharf at midnight, pretty blue and dusty and down-at-heel. The city wasn't far from Braintree, and memory of the big wide house and Abigail filled him with nostalgia.

He'd go there and write, that's what he'd do! Write books on politics and keep his diary; sit by the fireside like any normal citizen, in quiet family life with his wife and his son, John Quincy.

Tears came to his eyes as he looked out over the harbor where he'd seen the famous Tea Party. Ah, there was the Common! And yonder, the court house where he'd defended the Englishman, Prescott, from a Yankee lynching—as fair an exhibition of justice as any in American history.

Massachusetts appreciated him, by Godfrey! and sniffing cod and Abigail's beans, John Adams set out for home. Never dreaming, as he walked up that wharfside, of a trip to Martinique with the *Blonde of the Sea.*

MARTINIQUE? Why, that's an island way down in the Caribbean —a little French colony colorful with Creoles, palm trees and Negroes and, in those days, the flags of King Louis' frigates keeping watch for the Union Jack. And what would a man like John Adams be doing with a blonde?

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Especially the toughest blonde to ever visit Boston Harbor in fiction or out of it—a tramp of the first water with an eye out for men.

Well, the *Blonde of the Sea* was a slaver—fat-beamed with four masts—a hell-pack in her foc'sle—the Devil himself on her quarterdeck. John Adams didn't join up with her willing, either. Stiff as a fence post, he went aboard, smuggled by five sailors with belaying pins snaredrumming on his head.

Then imagine John Adams' feelings when he woke up three days later on the Gulf Stream. Shanghaied! Impressed on a British vessel engaged in illicit slave traffic. What a story for the school books if they ever got hold of that!

John Adams slammed up to that *Blonde's* quarter deck, and what he told that skipper then was a caution. They say his roars echoed clear to Portugal; that whales, deafened, fled for Davy Jones' Locker; the bottom fell out of every ship's glass on the Atlantic, and there was a tidal wave in Japan.

That's probably exaggerated, but it's no exaggeration to say that if John Adams ever found himself shanghaied there would've been a storm at sea. But the *Blonde's* skipper laughed at storms. He had a peg leg, but you ought to have seen the shark that did it!—and he squalled at John Adams like to blow the man down.

"Avast, an' swab the decks, you Yankee lubber! Pipe down! Belay! I wouldn't care if you was the President of the United States, you'll work aboard this ship, or it's all hands to give you a flogging!"

So it was all hands to give Bonny Johnnie a flogging, and a flogging in those days was something to remember. John Adams got a taste of the cat that would have killed an ordinary man. Only John Adams wasn't ordinary.

When they knocked him down, he bounced right up again like one of those equilibrial toys. They pounded him with belaying pins, and he wouldn't stay belayed. Hanging him by the thumbs from a yard-arm didn't calm him, and when salt in his cat-stripes didn't tame him, they keel-hauled him for a spell.

It was all part of the British method of impressing American seamen, but instead of being impressed, John Adams kept on telling that skipper what he thought of him. He said some day the British would pay for it, and he'd bet it would be soon. All the way down the Gulf Stream he kept up his one-man mutiny. There was hell and highwater aboard that *Blonde of the Sea!*

No matter, the peg-legged skipper wouldn't come about and return John Adams to Boston; the incorrigible mutineer continued on his Caribbean cruise. It is the fashion, I know, to sigh over the good old days of the sailing ships, but the life aboard was brutal as the cat-o'-nine-tails, and even so indestructible a man as our Adams had a hard time trying to survive.

One day they were beating down through the West Indies, towing John Adams off the taffrail at his rope's end, when the *Blonde* ran into a rival. Meet *My Lady of the Boudoir,* French and fast, barkentine out of Cherbourg with twenty-one guns. She took an instant dislike for the *Blonde of the Sea,* and you know what happens when a brunette dislikes a blonde.

France and England were squabbling over the slave trade, and *My Lady* and the *Blonde* flew at each other, no holds barred. Cannon balls screaming. Musketoons flashing. They caught each other with grappling hooks, and the battle was on.

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Get an idea of John Adams' predicament, then—floundering astern on a tow-line!—especially when *My Lady* bounced a ten-pounder through the slaver's midriff and the *Blonde* decided the best thing to do was sink.

Just in time they fished him out, as ferocious a catch as was ever hauled from the Caribbean. And that's how John Adams got to Martinique. One look at him, and the French vessel's captain knew he'd caught a Russian spy; and even Rafael Sabatini couldn't have saved him, for he refused to tell the Governor of Martinique his name.

They'd have shot him sure as shooting, if it hadn't been for the French Revolution. Yes, his back was against the wall and he was just refusing a bandage for his eyes when the French Revolution reached Martinique.

"Free?" he whispered at the young lieutenant who had dashed up with the reprieve. Convinced as he was of his immortality, he'd been none the less reluctant to test the theory, and his knees, in spite of him, were shaking.

"Oui! Congratulations, *monsieur! Liberté, egalité, fraternité!* King Louis has lost his head for the last time. *Vive la Révolution!"*

"I always knew the French people were all right," said John Adams huskily. *"Vive la Révolution!"*

"And now that *monsieur's* troubles are over," the officer smiled, "where would *monsieur* like to go?".

"Philadelphia!" said John Adams.

VI

AND that's about all there is to this story. Except this. John Adams walked up the dock at Philadelphia, and looked around at the red brick houses, and emitted a sigh that sounded a whole lot like a sigh of relief.

Three months he'd been away—Sweet Land of Liberty! it seemed like three years. And it seemed to John Adams as if every time he'd opened his mouth in those three months a mob had got after him. Two New York mobs had chased him, one in Connecticut, and an outraged husband. Tinkering, coopering, doctoring—all had their tougher aspects, it appeared.

Why, a man couldn't even preach a sermon without getting into trouble. If there's a moral to this tale, I think John Adams, himself, suspected it. Something about the grass on the other side of the fence always looking greener.

Well, it was certainly nice to saunter for a change; and what pleased him even more was the sight of a large crowd moving toward him as he strolled into Faneil Square. So his hiatus had been justified! A welcoming committee! They appreciated him, after all!

Halting by a horse-block to await this demonstration, he struck a statuesque pose; couldn't help thrusting his chest a little. Then he almost turned to granite in astonishment. Why, there was the tinker! Right there in the forefront of the crowd! And the cooper from Morristown, full of applejack! By George! the Wizard of Physic was with them, a lot thinner than he'd been before the purge, but recognizable in his Indian hat. There, too, was that scoundrelly New York printer! And the Reverend Joshua Gunn! And the captain of the Providence packet! And the sailors who'd shanghaied him on Boston Common!

Not only that, the whole United States Army seemed to be escorting them, each accompanied by a cockade-hatted trooper armed with musket, bayonet fixed. Drums were rolling somewhere, and the Liberty Bell began to toll. John Adams stood like statuary.

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Misty-eyed. Emotion-choked. Never had he been received by such a reception!

A bristling colonel stepped forward and placed his hand on John Adams' shoulder. For a moment neither man could speak. You can see them stand ing there regarding each other like figures in a historic painting; well, it was the colonel who spoke first.

"In the name of the Government of the United States, I arrest you on a charge of murder!"

"Murder?" John Adams broke that statue-pose as a monument is animated by a bomb. "Me?" voice shriller than an off-key fife. "You're arresting me for *murder?*"

"It's him, all right," came the tinker's nasal twang. "I'd reckonize th' critter in any disguise. Him as traded th' silver buckles off'n his shoes."

"Sure, it's him," from the cooper. "Know him anywhere! I thought he seemed mighty nervous an' careful never to tell me his full name."

"Never give me no name any time," cried the Wizard of Physic. "Look! He's still wearin' the same coat!"

The printer roared, "He's a maniac, I tell you!"

"Dangerous atheist!" cried the Reverend Gunn.

"Same one as pawned the watch for a ticket to Boston!"

"Yah, that's 'im we shanghaied, ain't it, Peter? G'ory! A bleedin' murderer!"

At that, the foul yell of "Murder!" loosened half the bricks of Philadelphia, and John Adams' answering roar sent twenty chimneys toppling.

"And who am I accused of murdering?" he thundered at the colonel of the guard. "Who am I supposed to have murdered, hey?"

"The President of the United States!" roared the colonel. "There's a rumor afoot he hasn't been seen for the last three months, and my private opinion was he'd been assassinated. So I sent scouts out to search for the body.

"They didn't find the corpse, by heaven, but they found this tinker wearing the President's shoe buckles! We've been trailing you ever since, my man! The tinker says you gave him those silver buckles—you pawned the President's watch!—I'm a liar if that's not his coat you're wearing now! Assassin," roared the colonel, "I accuse you of murdering John Adams!"

"But *I* am John Adams!" John Adams squalled. "Don't you know me when you see me, you infernal idiot! I'm the President of the United States!"

"Ha ha!" That colonel was convulsed. "Listen to that, will you? Look who says he's the President of the United States!"

THE crowd looked and laughed, and John Adams looked, too, but he didn't laugh. He caught his reflection in the watering-trough beside the horse-block, and he pulled a green breath of horror. His clothes hung his frame in fragments. His linen resembled that of a scarecrow. He was wearing wooden sabots which the French officer in Martinique had loaned him; his face was sun-fried, brine-cooked, frizzled; his hair hung wild about his ears, and he had a lousy, gray beard.

Well, the crowd was screaming, "Lynch him!" and John Adams didn't even bother to argue. He sailed over that horse-block like a wild man taking off for Borneo. He went through that crowd and across that square like a shot. Shots were pretty swift in those days, too, but the ones that came after him didn't overtake J. Adams.

There he was leading a mob, again, and this time across Philadelphia, but

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he'd had some mighty fine practice at mob-leading, and they say it isn't in the history books because John Adams went so fast that no historians saw him. He didn't let any grass grow under his feet that time. Even the grass that looked greener on the other side of the fence.

I don't have to tell you where he went, either.

Right! Straight back to that very brick building he'd walked out of three months before. Yes sir, and he was so darned glad to be back there in that building that he locked himself in his room so he couldn't get out.

Some say he bathed, shaved and changed into fresh linen in three minutes, and some say he did it in two. At any rate, he was there at his desk in State garments with the Constitution in front of him when Alex Hamilton banged on the door. He opened it, even for Alex Hamilton.

"Good morning, Mister President. I hear you've been away. I didn't notice it."

"I am almost glad to see you, Hamilton."

Thomas Jefferson rushed in. "Great Scott! Mister President, you've kept the cabinet waiting for three months! Congress is wild! There's a row over the Alien and Sedition Act! You've got to sign this Finance Bill! Hamilton, here wants to be appointed General-in-Chief of the Army! That Liquor Tax needs revision! You must settle the X-Y-Z Affair! The Ambassador from Spain wants an appointment! Here's a report from Jay on England! Can you receive a delegation from Virginia? What about the Navy? That Italian Count is here demanding an audience! My God! we're on the verge of a war with France! And there's a great crowd out in front—it seems there's a rumor you've been assassinated—would you mind stepping out on the balcony and making a speech to the American people—"

John Adams beamed.

How good it was to be back at his Presidential desk. What a luxury to be able to relax. Restful, that's what it was. Serene. He smiled quietly at the mass of documents to be signed; calmly told Hamilton he wouldn't get the Army appointment; assured Jefferson he would veto any war with France. As he strolled out to the balcony amid a storm of protests and cheers, he told himself that for the first time in his life he felt —and the word came to him as a balm —placid.

ALL that, of course, is supposing. Which means it isn't a true story. But there's some truth in it, just the same. Adams did walk out on the government, as previously stated, and he was hardly noted for placidity. As a matter of fact, too, he was once lost in the woods—with his wife while they were on their way from Baltimore to Washington where they were to be the first occupants of the White House.

Stubbornly resisting political pressure, he kept America out of war with France. Disliking Britannia's method of ruling the wave, he ordered a fleet to challenge that misrule, and was the father of the American Navy.

As for his quarrel with Hamilton, his free-thinking agnosticism, his scrappy temper, all those are a matter of record. He even quarreled with Thomas Jefferson, and was so resentful of his Vice-president's consequent election to the Presidency that he left Washington in a blue huff with wire wheels, refusing to attend his successor's inauguration ceremonies.

Years later, he and Jefferson were reconciled. They wrote long letters to

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each other, discussing politics, philosophy and religion. After sixty years of study, John Adams wrote to his friend, he thought religion could be summed up in four simple words. "Be just and good."

It is true he declared to some New Englanders he was never going to die, and in all likelihood his short-lived hearers misunderstood him.

The Fourth of July—Independence Day, 1826—old John Adams, frosty-haired, dim-eyed, lay semi-conscious in his sick bed. Told his old friend Jefferson was ailing in Monticello, he whispered, "But Jefferson still lives!" and died.

But his old friend and political rival had beat him on the record—for Thomas Jefferson had died two hours before. What a painting for the history books—the fireworks down below, and the zenith bright with dawn-stripes and late stars—the two great patriots meeting on that final highroad, taking leave of America on Independence Day!

And perhaps John Adams was right, and both will forever live. Certainly Jefferson has been timeless, and who can say John Adams is not immortal? Scrappy he may have been. Temperamental and full of spleen. But he hated tyranny and oppression; worshipped Democracy and Freedom. His sense of Justice was as even as the very scales, bearing out Jefferson's appraisal—"Disinterested as the Being who made him."

That sort of man can never die.

What Doom Shadows America?
What Black Night Waits When

The Sun Sets at 5

Smooth Kyle Returns for His Greatest Adventure

In a Great New Novel by

Borden Chase

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

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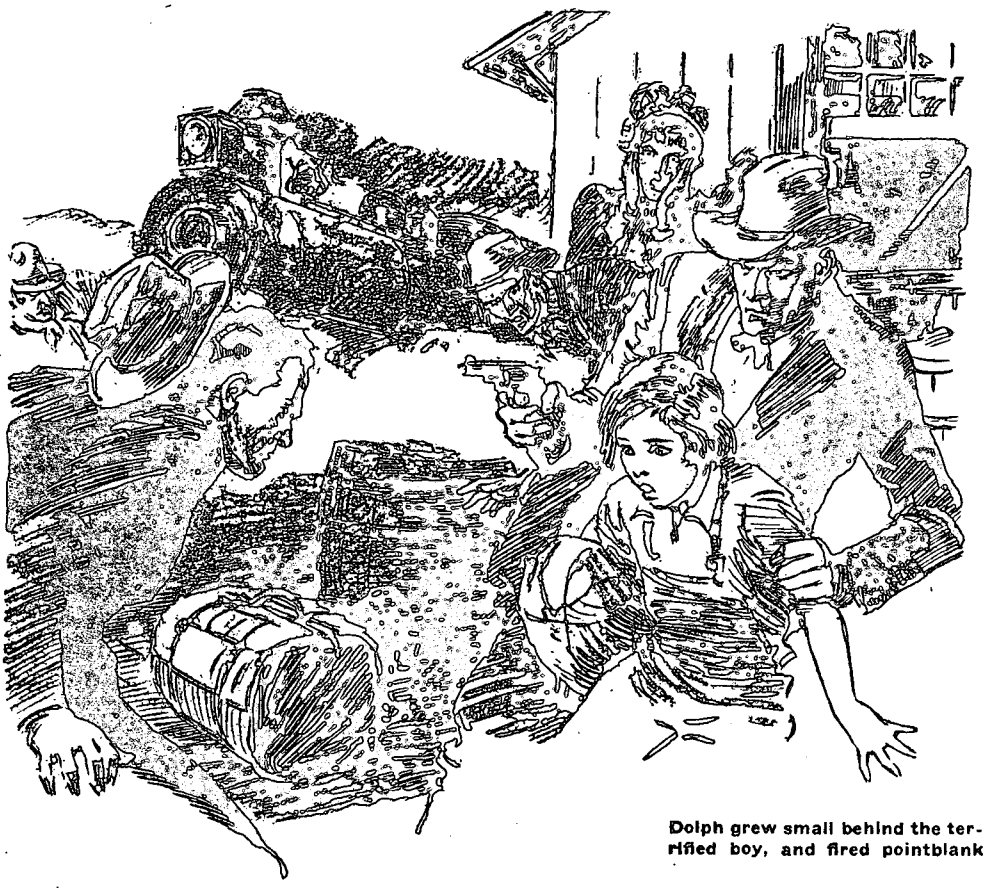

Dolph grew small behind the terrified boy, and fired pointblank

Bad Wolf Bluff

By L. L. FOREMAN

A toast to a gallant gentleman—Jairus Gillam who was smart enough to know the West was growing beyond him and his kind, and quick enough with a gun to survive the change

THE little crowd that usually met around Apache's station to watch the daily passenger train go through, grew quiet with Gillam's arrival. Down by the loading pens a man stepped out into the sun's glare, crossed the shining tracks, and walked up the hill, the eyes of the crowd following him. When he returned, the sheriff walked with him.

The sheriff murmured a few words as he passed Dolph Piley, standing at the end of the platform with little Nick. Dolph Piley shrugged and growled a low-toned reply, his eyes narrowed. The sheriff glanced sharply on Gillam, and joined the crowd. It was the first time in years that a Gillam and a Piley had got that close

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together, and the sheriff watched in concern for new signs of an old trouble.

Gillam, aware of Piley's dour presence, gave the wolfer no open notice and only a part of his mind. He was thinking, mockingly, as he had thought all the way in from Cave Creek to say goodbye to Anne Hafford: "Well, she's goin'—an' I'm caught in my own net. Funny, that."

He could look down without bending his head and see the tip of Anne's nose, an eyebrow, and the line of her cheek. That much had been his first close sight of her, and he had known at once that she was more than pretty. He had known, too, who she was. Everybody knew that the daughter of Senator Lucas B. Hafford—Luke Hafford, he called himself in the cattle country—was staying at Hafford Lodge.

The quiet arrival of the sheriff was not lost on Gillam. That ponderous fool—did he think he could prevent trouble if it came? Law had never held back either a Gillam or a Piley. But Dolph had kept out of the way these three years, and it wasn't reasonable that he'd pull anything at this chance encounter. Gillam turned his whole attention back to Anne's profile.

He remembered that first close sight of her in Cave Creek Canyon—her absorbed unawareness of his nearness, her deft fingers as she mixed colors and tried to match the exact shades of a lichen-spotted boulder. Too painstaking in detail, he thought, though he knew nothing of painting.

He had seen her from the distance, and unashamedly stalked her until he stood silently in the sycamore shadows, watching her.

Lucas B. Hafford's daughter. It was a challenge to his sense of irony. She looked sort of prim and proper, reflecting in a measure the grim rectitude of her father, who had often denounced to receptive audiences of Cochise County voters the law-defying despotism of a certain type of cattle king—meaning one J. Gillam.

It was Gillam's way to plan before acting. Next day he did his stalking with a half-grown pup asleep in the crook of his arm. Unseen and soft-footed, he put it down and withdrew. The pup sat up, yawned, and gazed about with interest. It was large, with clumsy paws, short legs, and an abiding trust in all things human.

WHEN Gillam rode openly by that way an hour later, the pup had found the girl, and the girl had forgotten her painting.

"G'mornin'." Gillam dismounted casually, so that his long legs and back moved with an easy grace that was not entirely unstudied. His dark blue eyes had an arresting depth of color against the strong tan of his skin, and the width of his mouth was offset by the definite lines of his jaw. His crow-black hair, when he doffed his hat, was crisp and ruffled, and an unruly lock of it fell across his broad forehead. He knew these things, knew that he showed a masculine virility that drew women's eyes against all will.

"It seems," he remarked, calmly impertinent, "that the pious prejudices of a critical father don't always descend to his wayward children. The hon'rable senator would be scandalized to see his daughter fraternizin' with a Gillam dog."

She flushed a little at his direct approach, but was quick to return an oblique shot. "He probably would," she agreed. "I've often heard him speak his mind on the subject of Gillam dogs."

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He acknowledged the hit with a mocking wince. She was not to know that he had planned that opening for her, hoping she would have the ready wit to take advantage of it. He had learned to give women—clever women—the first victory. It weakened their guard, left them vulnerable to feminine repentance. For stupidity in any form he had only an impatient contempt. This girl was quick and clever, and the game promised to be good.

Her eyes were a clear gray. He looked into them thoughtfully, until her flush deepened with anger at his cool arrogance, and she glanced away. "That durn pup," he said, with a disconcerting shift to humbleness, "is always leadin' me into trouble. Hope he didn't bother you any."

"Not at all." The girl began gathering up paints and brushes. She gave him a look that was purposely cold. "You're Jairus Gillam, aren't you? Somebody pointed you out to me in Cave Creek."

He nodded, with an indifferent wonder as to what had been said about him. Nothing good, that was sure. "An' you're Anne Hafford. You packin' to quit? Curly Bill won't like that."

"Curly Bill?"

"The pup," he explained solemnly. "All Gillam dogs have got bad names."

He saw the involuntary twitch come to her mouth, and he encouraged it with a grin. He could be engagingly artless and friendly when he wished. She smiled, half unwillingly, bent to pat Curly Bill, and Gillam knew he had won the first and hardest trick of the game.

Before he left, two hours later, she had consented to paint Curly Bill. And so it became necessary for Gillam to see that Curly Bill kept his appointments on time, and to help in the posing. They found time for talk. Anne had come down to seldom-used Hafford Lodge on doctors' orders, after trying to cram four years of study into three. Gillam found it was possible to scuttle her seriousness, and enjoyed doing it.

Anne made a lot of false starts on that picture, and finally gave it up in laughing despair. She was inveigled into one attempt at painting Gillam, too, but soon abandoned that.

"You and Curly Bill," she declared, "are too—what's the word?—volatile. I'll have to go back to rocks. They're reliable. They retain a decent stability and don't keep changing their looks."

SO GILLAM obligingly helped her hunt for rocky scenery. A week of that, and their original purpose was mislaid. They just rode together, meeting each day in the canyon without any agreed plan, and setting forth for whatever point Gillam happened to choose. Each day they rode farther and parted later.

They soon came to using first names.

"Don't you ever have any work to do, Jay?"

"Yeah, but I use system. You can get a surprisin' lot o' work done with the right system. I pay good men to do it, while I loaf." That wasn't wholly true. He could work harder and longer than any of his hired riders, when the mood was on him.

"Yours is the biggest cattle ranch in the county, isn't it? It must have taken more than loafing to get it."

"Well, a few Piley bullets helped," he admitted lightly.

When he spoke like that it was easier to believe what people said of him.

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easier to remember his reputation. "All the Gillams were ranchers, an' had the sense to buy their land before the homesteaders swarmed in. I'm the last Gillam, y'know, an' I finally fell heir to everythin'. The last man alive can gen'rally figure to come home to an empty house an' a full larder."

Anne gazed straight ahead over the ears of her horse. "It didn't seem to work out that way with the Pileys," she pointed out quietly.

"Sure didn't," Gillam agreed, still in his flippant drawl. "But then the Pileys never did have anythin' 'cept sharp-shootin' eyes an' big wishes. Dolph Piley camps up in the hills these days, huntin' wolves an' coyotes for their bounty. That's about all he's good for. Ev'ry so often somebody cuts through my fence an' butchers a fat calf or two. His work, I reckon. Dolph's the last Piley left, not countin' the boy."

"Boy?"

"Nick—hungry-eyed little button who tails around with Dolph. His mother was a Piley. I've an idea his father was Dart Gillam, second cousin o' mine. There might've been a weddin', only Dart got killed soon's the trouble broke. This country was full o' Gillams an' Pileys till we whittled each other down."

"What caused all that trouble? Some say one thing, and some say another. I'd like to hear the Gillam side."

Gillam grinned faintly, a cold levity in his eyes. "It used to be you didn't need any special cause," he remarked, "to light a feud between cattlemen an' a bunch o' beef-hungry settlers. It just cropped up natural. You found a fresh hide with your brand on it, buried on settler's ground. You hanged the settler. Then you had all the breed to kill, or be killed."

"They say you—er—"

"I got three," drawled Gillam. "Wasn't as good a man as my dad. He tallied up five before they bushed him."

HE WAS like that—hard and cynical in moments, shocking the ears that had been pleasantly lulled by his easy humor, his double-edged comments, his almost furtive kindnesses. He could be charming even in his satire, and win over to him any man, woman, or animal when he chose to make the effort.

Yet he was friendless, except among horses and dogs and children who listened only to the tone of his voice and had never been subtly lashed by the mocking devils that ambushed behind his smile.

In his self-sufficiency he wanted no friends, for his long and early training in trouble had given his outlook an inverted twist. The circumstances of his life had developed in him a hard alertness that forbade placing any trust among the homesteaders and cowmen settlers who were his only neighbors. With the overdistinct vision of a lonely man, he saw in them the dulled resentment that had its birth in their adherence to the Piley cause.

Nobody cared greatly for Dolph Piley, his morals or his habits, but he stood as a symbol of the homesteaders' old struggle against the high-handed ways of the cattle kings. As a symbol, Dolph Piley had many champions. As an individual, he drew only a grudging recognition from the homesteaders. Gillam got an ironic humor out of that.

It was the morning after they spent the night in the canyon of the old Apache stronghold that Anne announced she was leaving. "I'm leaving

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tomorrow, Jay." Her tone held a high brightness that was alien to her usual quiet speech. "I've got to get back for exams."

Gillam said, "That so?" and added, as if the meaning of his casual words were all he felt, "Durn shame. I'll miss you."

It had sprung from trickery on his part, that trip to the old Apache stronghold. He had suggested it without mentioning the distance.

They couldn't start back that night. The mountain trails were steep, and their horses were tired. Gillam built a fire and they sat by it, watching its shifting glow on the great rocks and not talking much, while the stars got brighter in the night-blackening sky.

Anne was worried, Gillam knew. She had guessed that he had planned this, he could tell. Folks around Cave Creek had gone out of their way to let her know their opinion of Gillam and her scandalous friendship with him. She could have expected something like this.

And then, quite simply and naturally, Anne curled up and murmured a sleepy, "Good night, Jay."

"G'night, Anne."

After Anne dropped off to sleep, Gillam looked at her for a long time across the fire. Very carefully, then, he rose and laid his coat over her, and went off on a slow walk down the rock-studded canyon. He halted by Old Shoe and leaned against it, smoking. When his cigarette burned down he flipped away the butt and stared at its dying smolder.

"Me! I never would have thought—" He shook his head in lost amazement. "Well, I'll be damned!"

And now she was going away, back to her confounded studies and her regulated life, while he. . . .

GILLAM heard somebody on the station platform mutter, "Dolph's sendin' the kid off to an' orphan home. Tired o' feedin' an extra mouth, he says. Does look like somebody might've took the kid in round here."

Gillam let his carefully indifferent glance range along the platform to where Dolph Piley and the boy stood apart from the rest. Little Nick had a skinny, shrinking look about him. He had a paper-wrapped bundle under one arm. His big freckles and his big eyes were about the same color, and his hair was nearly long enough for a girl. He'd be better off in an orphanage than be with Piley, anyway, Gillam thought as he looked back to Anne.

She was going away. She was—Damn it, in a minute the train would roll in and she'd be gone.

She had turned her head and was gazing toward Piley and the boy. Gillam looked that way again. Curly Bill had ambled up to the kid, wriggling self-consciously and trying to get acquainted. The kid was willing enough.

Piley shifted a foot, and Curly Bill cocked his head at it, sniffing before he backed away. The boy looked up quickly, got some sort of silent command from Piley's hard black eyes, and didn't look again at Curly Bill.

Anne said, "It's hard on a boy, isn't it? Being left alone, I mean."

"M-mm," said Gillam, and the shrill blare of a locomotive's whistle brought a constricting twitch to his lips. "Say, I never did show you Bad Wolf Bluff. Worth seein', that big old rock. Maybe next time you come, huh?"

She brought her slow gaze to his face. "Sometimes," she remarked thoughtfully, "I wonder if you're not a sort of bad wolf bluff, yourself, Jay. I mean—they call you a hard man

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and a killer. Yet I've never seen that side of you. I can hardly believe it's there. I almost think it's—well, a sort of bad wolf legend that you find amusing to play up to. Am I right, Jay?"

"No," Gillam declared solemnly. "I love slaughter an' I eat up little girls when I can get 'em off alone. Ask anybody. Ask your hon'rable father. Still an' all, you better come back an' let me show you Bad Wolf Bluff as the sun goes down. It'll make a singin' pagan of you."

She didn't smile. Something dropped from her, some kind of armor, and her eyes were suddenly giving and asking with a naked frankness that tumbled all his thoughts and left him mute.

She asked simply, "Should I come back, Jay?" And the swelling roar of the coming train allowed nothing more to be said.

In the noise-filled moment of the train's grinding pause, Gillam's mind took a leap through triumph and on beyond. There was keen enticement in the vision his agile imagination conjured up. He could see them clearly. He could see the face of Lucas B. Hafford, that pompous monument of self-conscious dignity, when he sauntered up with Anne beside him.

"Well, Luke, I reckon you've got some explainin' to do to the voters. I'm your son-in-law!"

AND the citizens of Cochise County, particularly that body of poverty-patch cowmen and settlers who were his neighbors—they'd be all fussed up trying to figure how they should act toward Anne. Anne, the daughter of Senator Lucas B. Hafford—wife of Jairus Gillam! It would set before them a lot of knotty problems in correct deportment.

And the senator's friends, and the people of Anne's world—they'd be up the same tree. Gillam saw himself being presented to them. They'd know his background and his reputation, and they'd look for signs of it in him. And his sense of farce would break bounds under the temptation, and he'd play up.

"Doctor, this is my son-in-law, Jairus Gillam. Jairus, this is Doctor Van Der Garabinian."

"Ah—how d'you do, Mr. Gillam."

"Howdy, Doc."

A girl of such a world would in time come to wince, of course, at the careless speech, the too-ready wit and elemental ways that had at first only intrigued her. She'd grow weary of attempting to patch up his blunders, of trying to explain him to her friends. Staleness, then, and the birth of regret.

The state newspapers would carry it: *Senator's Daughter Divorces Notorious Feudist Husband.* Another hard lump for the Hon. Luke to chew.

Her steady eyes were still on his face when the train came to its final halt. Somebody carried off her bright yellow grips. She would come back. Her eyes promised it. He had played his game well, better than he had thought.

If only Anne were not Anne. If only—

Curly Bill let out a surprised yelp. Gillam wheeled fast enough to see Piley lower his right boot. The boy, stumbling toward the train before Piley's heavy hand, looked as if the kick had got him instead of the pup.

Gillam had a quick mind. He called out, his voice metallic with contempt, "That's the first time I ever saw a skunk beat off a dog!"

Piley stopped dead and his head came up. Years of bitter envy crowded

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their hatred into his stare. He said nothing, only his eyes and the quickened rise and fall of his chest giving evidence that the remark had bitten deep. His raw way of living had sharpened in him the Piley edge of violence.

Gillam said, "That remark was for you, Piley. Keep away from things o' mine—or be ready to take care o' yourself!"

Piley spoke then, in a harsh and rapid monotone. "I'm always ready—always ready an' waitin'!"

"So'm I," said Gillam. "I've waited ready three years—but the skunk I wait for keeps late hours when he comes beef-stealin' onto my range."

Piley's jawbones took on a tight prominence. "Don't push me, Gillam!" He gave his warning in a husky whisper. "Damn you, don't push me!" His right hand was hidden behind the boy, and he kept the boy before him.

GILLAM framed his next remark with deliberation for its effect, and gave it in a brittle drawl. "Some day I aim to track down that skunk by its smell, an' hang his hide on my varmint fence!"

Dolph Piley's lips sucked in. He made his play, by instinct snatching at the one advantage circumstances offered him. He grew short behind the boy, and the round eye of his gun's end rose over the boy's shoulder. The burst of the gun's report rang through the station, and the boy jerked away from its deafening nearness.

Gillam's side-step and draw from armpit were done together. He leveled and fired as Piley thumbed back for a second shot.

He took aim again while Piley fell. His eyes were coldly bright, and now his quirking smile was a caricature of the easy grin he wore in moments of caustic humor. He looked the more sinister by reason of that icy smile.

The sheriff, thrusting through the shocked crowd, made for him at a lumbering run, but it was Anne who was first to catch and drag down his gun arm. Her cry, bearing its share of the horror in her eyes, broke through the brief space of silence.

"No—not the boy! Oh—not the boy!"

The sheriff reached them. "Gillam, you devil!" He grabbed at the smoking gun, rammed his own into Gillam's side. "You'll hang for this, by—!"

Gillam was aware of Anne's relinquished grasp of his arm, of the sick, stunned look in her eyes, of her swift turn and stumbling run to the train. But he did not look after her. He dipped his coldly mocking gaze into the furious stare of the lawman.

"Self-defense," he drawled. "He drew an' shot first. You saw it. Everybody here saw it."

"You pushed him to it, you killin' hound!"

"Can you jail me for that?"

A train door banged shut. Released airbrakes hissed. Gillam couldn't keep from sliding a glance along the windows. They were crowded with the faces of passengers, staring at him and at the body being carried from the platform. He caught a glimpse of a little green hat and a bowed face under it.

She wouldn't be coming back, ever. This memory would lose its sharpness under the imprints of others, back in her own world. She would come to wonder why she hadn't known him for what he was, with his reputation before her.

The train jerked, slid away, passed the loading pens and gathered speed. The station crowd bleakly dispersed

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with much muttering, and the baffled sheriff rapped a final command before stamping off.

"Hold y'self ready to be called in, Gillam!"

"Sure." Gillam nodded. He picked up Curly Bill.

He found Nick trudging along the Cave Creek road, his bundle still under his arm. The boy turned frightened eyes up to him and looked ready to bolt. Gillam drew up and got down. He tucked Curly Bill under the boy's free arm. Curly Bill licked exploringly at a small and grimy hand and liked it. The boy held him closer.

Gillam said gravely, "He's a good dog, that. Nearly won me a prize once. A big prize."

He bent, picked up boy and dog. "Maybe you an' me better throw in together, 'count o' Curly Bill likes us both. I got plenty room on my place."

The boy gradually relaxed his taut young body. "You're Gillam, ain't-cha?" he challenged. "Didja kill Dolph?"

"Yeah."

There was a long pause before the boy spoke again. "Well, I guess it's all right," he mumbled. "Kinda funny, though. You ain't like what Dolph said. He was a liar, anyhow, an' I'm glad he's dead. He said 's'mornin' my paw wasn't nothin' but a—"

"Listen, kid." Gillam looked back at Apache down in the distance, at the empty railroad tracks shining under the sun. "You an' me, we got a long old way to go before we forget what was said an' done today. Let's get started, huh? Let's shove along home."

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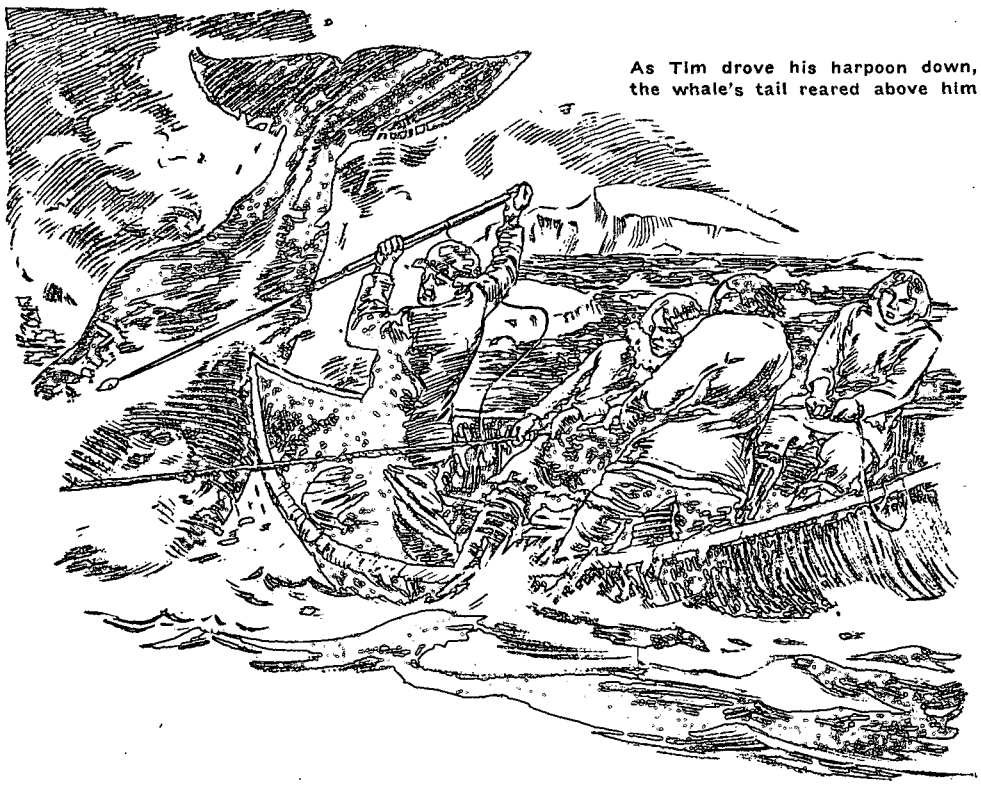

As Tim drove his harpoon down, the whale's tail reared above him

The White Oomailik

By FRANK R. PIERCE

TIM BANNING, a lieutenant in the Revenue Cutter Service, is ordered to the North to carry relief to an ice-locked whaling fleet. Tim has a personal interest at stake because three of the stranded ships have just been given to him by his uncle, the old whaling tycoon, Sulphur-bottom Banning. Furthermore, Tim's job is complicated by the fact that the stricken fleet includes ships owned by the Ridleys, the Bannings' bitterest rivals; and Tim must not let this rivalry interfere with his duty as a Government man.

Actually, the Ridleys will benefit by the Alaskan catastrophe; they have an enormous supply of oil and whalebone on hand, and now the market will be booming. So Tim Banning expects that Bill Ridley will try to hamstring the Overland Relief Expedition. And Tim is right: Aroused from a month-long drunk by the sinister Scalzo, a Ridley man, Bill Ridley leaves his native wife and sets out to wreck Tim Banning's plans.

SUPPLIES following by reindeer, Tim mushes north alone, and on the trail he meets up with Mary Ridley, Bill's lovely, resolute sister. Tim and Mary join forces, for their common goal is the stranded fleet; and together they reach Bill Ridley's igloo. There they find Arnaretauk, Bill's wife, deserted and about to bear a child, and they give her aid. In spite of the trickery of Antuk, an Eskimo shaman, Tim is able to hire more herders and deer. With these Tim plans to join the supply caravan; then he and Mary will push on ahead.

Crossing the ice, the expedition is attacked by wolves—and ambushed by a sniper who kills two of Tim's herders. All Tim sees of the mysterious attacker is his ermine hood, which Mary recognizes. It is her brother's. But the sniper escapes.

This story began in the Argosy for February 2

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HAVING turned over the reindeer to the caravan led by Surgeon Newton, Tim, accompanied by Mary, comes on the first of the ice-locked ships. It is his own, the *Audacious*, manned only by the dead body of its captain; but soon Tim and Mary reach another whaler, inhabited by the stranded crew. On a third ship, the *Mary Ridley*, they find Bill Ridley, who claims that he did not attack the reindeer herd, that he lost his ermine parka months before. But as soon as he is alone Bill burns the tell-tale hood. Tim Banning smells the burning fur and understands; and when he pushes on, leaving Mary with her brother, he is wondering whether Bill Ridley will prove himself ally or enemy in the huge task of rescue. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

MEN ON ICE

THE whaler *Mary Ridley* had been Mary's goal. And now that Tim Banning neared Point Barrow, his goal, he was conscious of the same eagerness he had noticed in the girl. He was like a runner nearing the tape. And like the runner, he realized he was traveling on nerve.

Actually, he was headed for the settlement at Cape Smythe, which is below Barrow itself. But all that region is generally called Point Barrow.

As Tim mushed into the settlement, he was at first mistaken for an outfit from one of the imprisoned ships. Dog teams had been going back and forth between the various whalers in the vicinity—exchanging supplies.

Pulling up in front of the trading post, he was received in stunned silence by the trader and the several whaling skippers who recognized him. "Where did you come from, Banning?" a skipper bellowed finally, "A balloon? That's the only way you could get here."

Another stared hard at the ice, as if half expecting that by some strange miracle a revenue cutter had arrived. They crowded around and shook hands, flooding him with questions.

"Wait! Wait!" he pleaded as they surged into the post. "One at a time. The Government put me in command of an Overland Relief Expedition. And stop telling me the Bannings look after their men. We try to, but I'm a Revenue Cutter officer and I'm here because the government sent me."

He wanted to drive that home before resentment cropped out among the Ridley men.

"Five hundred reindeer are on their way, besides several sled-loads of medicine and provisions—Surgeon Newton is charge," he continued. "As they took the short way, and I followed the ice around the peninsula and called at Point Hope, they should be here any time. Now the first thing is to get the mail off my sled, make it up in packets for the different ships and dispatch messengers. The messenger can bring back a report on conditions from each ship."

"I'm glad you're here, Lieutenant," the trader declared. "I've done my best—"

"He's done a damned good job," a captain interrupted. "He's put everything in his post at our disposal."

"I've done my best, but we need somebody with Government authority behind him," the trader explained.

"Let's sit down and talk things over," Tim suggested.

In the midst of the discussion, a whaler appeared and asked to see Tim.

"The chairman of a grievance committee," a skipper predicted. "When men are crowded together they fight, or they let down and get sick easily. And that isn't all—"

"Don't I know it?" Tim answered. Men would want to go trapping, prospecting and hunting as soon as they felt they were strong enough to quit their ships. But it was Tim's theory that they

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belonged on their ships. The Eskimos would soon start on their annual whaling expeditions, and the whites who would want to accompany them would only be a burden, expecting, nevertheless, to share the profits.

Therefore Tim was in a thoughtful mood when he met the sailor. "Lieutenant," the man said, "we just heard you'd come. Will you do something about our quarters? We're men off'n the wrecked whalers. Some of us are Ridley men, some Banning men. We didn't get along until we began to weaken and get sick. Then we didn't give a damn."

THE man led the way to a gloomy structure, banked with snow to keep out the frost and icy winds. Bunks, each large enough to hold three men, had been built against the walls. A cook stove supplied some heat and a faint glow came through a single window. Cracks around the doors and at points where the roof joined the main structure supplied ventilation.

Eighty men were crowded into the building which was less than twenty-four by sixty feet in size.

Steam rose from a kettle on the stove, condensed on the walls, dripped down and froze. Near the floor there were ice coatings several inches thick on the walls. The bedding was damp, and some of it was stiff with frozen moisture.

Several men, knowing that the secret of warmth in Eskimo igloos was an oil lamp burning in a small space, had boxed in their bunks. Their makeshift seal-oil lamps smoked constantly, befouling the air and covering clothing and bodies with a greasy, black film.

Tim peered into one of these box-like compartments and wondered if he were really looking on white men. Filth and vermin were everywhere. "How often do these men leave their bunks?" he asked.

"Some of 'em hardly ever," the whaler committee chairman answered. "They've lost their nerve. But some of us haven't and we want something done before we begin to sink." Others surrounding the man nodded.

A Ridley master met Tim outside of the building. "After my ship was wrecked and the men landed," he explained, "the men refused to obey orders or recognize my authority in any way."

"How about you, Dan?" Tim asked of a Banning master.

"I kept some authority for a time, but there wasn't any way to enforce discipline, and so I finally lost control," Dan answered. "We've never faced a situation exactly like this before. The trader could do more with them than I could."

Tim began immediately to work on the weak point of the situation. He arranged for the use of an old store house belonging to the trader. This he fitted out with bunks and then removed the weakened men from the bunkhouse to it. He talked to the natives in their own language and obtained a supply of native and white clothing.

Those who were demoralized were hauled out, scrubbed up and given clean clothing, then transferred to the store house. They were promised fresh meat which would combat scurvy, and also promised stiff penalties if they did not keep their place clean and in order.

The others were told to remain in the bunkhouse and clean it up. The cleaning, airing and scrubbing that followed depleted the fuel supply, but it was necessary. Tim organized a hunting party in the charge of a native guide and sent it over the frozen tundra look-

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ing for caribou. "We've got to have fresh meat," he explained. "That problem will be settled when the reindeer herd arrives."

The trader provided him with two Eskimos who were thoroughly reliable. "Go back and locate the reindeer," he directed them, "and report their progress. If they're still a long way off, pick out some of the strongest and drive them here. We've got to have fresh meat or we'll have a mutiny. I've promised these men, and if I fail them there will be trouble."

They nodded and were off, eager to serve this amazing White Oomailik whose uniform and hard jaw had thus far subdued the most unruly among the whalers. While wearing the uniform was impractical in so cold a climate, nevertheless Tim made a point of appearing in it frequently.

TEN days after Tim's arrival he was awakened by an uproar. "The deer are coming! The deer are coming!" a man bellowed, rushing into Tim's cabin.

He rolled from his bunk, dressed hastily and rushed outside. The camp had gone mad. Men were pounding each other's backs and pointing. Cabins and igloos emptied, and furclad figures rushed about rounding up loose dogs that might frighten the reindeer.

Old King Cole, with head unbowed was leading the sled train into the settlement. Surgeon Newton was riding the last sled. But suddenly the crowd of stranded men had fallen silent and then the voices were lifted again, crying out furiously, hopelessly. No loose reindeer followed the train. The herd had not arrived.

Tim quieted the crowd with difficulty, then shook hands with the surgeon. "Did you see anything of the herd?"

"Not after I turned it over to Sheedy," Newton answered. "I've been making tracks ever since. You old tramp, I'm glad to see you," he added, grinning.

"The native boys will look after your deer and bring your personal gear along. You're going to share a cabin with me, Doc."

"Fine! Where's Mary? How'd she stand the trip?"

"I left her on the *Mary Ridley* with her brother," Tim told him. "Say, Doc, I had to trespass on your territory—I amputated an arm just below the elbow. The poor devil insisted I leave a few inches of arm below the joint so he could use it as a sort of hook. I pushed back the flesh, cut off the bone and left a flap, in case you are interested in the details."

"I'd better have a look as soon as possible," Newton answered, his face serious. "You had to do it, of course; and you whalers have performed some astounding amputations. But it's dangerous business—"

Tim stopped dead and grasped the doctor's arm. "Say, did that fellow come with you—the man with the bandaged face?"

"Yes. He's a man named Brennan; he froze his face. I looked it over. It's getting along all right, but he's touchy about it; he doesn't like to be looked at. Why?"

"I got the idea the bandage might be a mask to hide his identity," Tim explained. "And incident or two happened that didn't look just right, and naturally I tried to pin my suspicions on someone. Brennan seemed to be the logical man—more because of his attitude, and something I saw in his eyes, than anything he did."

"Well," Newton said, "he heard I was on the way and set out to pick up

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my trail. I imagine he is smart enough to believe he will get better food at expedition headquarters. Now what's to be done, aside from ordering you to rest for ten days?"

"An order I'll ignore," Tim said promptly. "I'll pass with a basket of chips."

"My grandmother used to say that when she wasn't feeling too well," Newton observed. "I'm in good shape myself. I've ridden the past week, knowing I'd have plenty of work when I got here. There must be a good deal of scurvy around."

"I've a hunting party out after caribou," Tim said. "It should bring in some fresh meat. We can kill the sled deer—except Old King Cole. We may need him."

"But that won't be a drop in the bucket," Newton said.

"I've asked the local chief about whaling, but he says it is too early. Whale flesh is red meat, you know. A friend of mine once fitted beef teabone into a whale steak and I thought I was eating beef. I've overhauled a whalegun and it is stowed in the cabin, ready for an emergency." Tim turned quickly. "Hello Brennan, what is it?"

"I thought I'd better report that I'm here, Lieutenant," the man said. And again Tim thought he caught an odd glitter, possibly a trace of mockery, in the man's eyes.

"Very well. Pick yourself a bunk at the barracks," Tim answered. "You brought enough tea, didn't you, to pay for whatever you'll eat?"

"Yes sir. It was delivered to the *Susan R's* master, who sent part of it to other ships," Brennan explained.

"You'll share equally with the others," Tim said. "Keep out of trouble. We have a pretty tough situation here."

Brennan nodded and started for the bunkhouse. Tim and Newton entered the cabin, closed the door and began to discuss the immediate future.

CHAPTER XVIII

A HARPOON IN MY HAND . . .

THE caribou hunting party returned five days after Newton's arrival. "They're traveling fast," Tim said. "That means they are traveling light."

The sleds pulled up in front of his cabin and unloaded one young caribou bull. "There's no game in the country," one of the men reported. "And we worked hard. This bull was the only thing we saw."

Tim, the trader and the surgeon went into a conference. "Is there any chance of getting a whale?" Tim asked.

"Too early," the trader answered, "but I've had natives watching open water on the chance a stray whale might be in one of the leads. Food intended for native use during the winter has gone to the whites, and must be replaced or we'll be forced to feed the natives white man's food."

When the discussion ended Tim announced his intention of returning to locate the herd. "You're needed here, Lieutenant," the trader insisted. "What you say goes. You've got the authority behind you and it can't be delegated. You'd better stay."

"Then I'll send two white men," Tim said, "and put in my time whale hunting near here."

He selected the two strongest white men and equipped them for a two weeks' trip, gave them specific instructions, and sent them off. Then he began preparing for a whale hunt. One big whale or several small ones might tide them over until the reindeer arrived.

In the midst of his preparations

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someone knocked on the door. "Come in," he yelled over his shoulder.

The door opened and Bill Ridley's huge figure filled the doorway. "Good morning, Lieutenant," he said, emphasizing the title to indicate his visit was official. "I'm here representing the *Mary Ridley* and the *Susan R.* We want an increase in our meat allowance. And we must have some fresh meat."

"No fresh meat is available," Tim answered. "In fact I'm leaving on a whale hunt tomorrow night."

"None available, eh?" Bill Ridley's eyes narrowed. "A man, passing through, reported you'd killed several sled deer. We didn't get any of that meat."

"It was used here," Tim explained.

"So that's it?" Bill growled. "You're giving this crowd the best of it. Well, my two crews move here then." He turned to go.

"Just a minute, Ridley," Tim ordered. "That fresh meat was divided among the worst scurvy cases, regardless of what whaling outfit they had worked for. When the herd gets here—"

"When the herd gets here," Bill jeered. "That's all I've heard since you passed through. The whole business is a grandstand play."

"I've taken a lot from you, Ridley," Tim said, "but you're looking for trouble and you'll get it, before the ice goes out, if you don't change your tactics." He walked over to the window and looked out, feeling quite certain that Mary had accompanied him. She was standing at the head of her dog team, waiting. "Mary," Tim called, "get your brother out of here, I'm sick of his bickering."

The girl came over to the cabin. "Come on, Bill," she urged. "You can't afford a fight with a Banning now. It's not going to make anybody think better of you."

Ridley's face was dark, and he retorted bitterly: "I'm going to show everybody a few things before I'm done with it. . . . Banning, I want fresh meat and I want it within twenty-four hours."

"If we get a whale, or if the reindeer arrive, you'll get it," Tim answered. "Otherwise—no."

"Then I'm first on the list?"

"You are," Tim answered, "not because of your threats, but because you haven't yet had meat." He closed the window and watched Bill Ridley slam out and join his sister. They made camp a quarter of a mile away and were soon joined by a number of men who had long worked for the Ridleys.

LATE the following day Tim received a report that a big whale had appeared in one of the leads nearly ten miles away. It was the opinion of the natives that the White Oomailik, with his whalegun, might kill the monster before it escaped. Native whalers, with their primitive weapons, were less effective and the whale might escape.

While Tim was lashing the whalegun to a sled, with such other equipment as he needed, the natives were moving an umiak over the ice toward the lead.

The umiak, made of skin, was light enough for two men to carry if necessary, yet it would support its crew and a ton of freight. A hole could be repaired with needle and thread, and its skin sides would bounce off ice like rubber. The native, afloat, doesn't even expect to use needle and thread.

Tim followed the natives as they dragged the sled supporting the umiak across the ice, fighting their way over pressure ridges. Often they lifted sled

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and craft bodily. They worked furiously, without a word from Tim; for they knew that the whale might very well be the margin between life and death.

As they launched the umiak in the lead, the native chief produced the impedimenta to insure good luck. The amulet was the tip of a red fox's tail. He also handed Tim the harpooner's skin headgear, from which dangled two exquisitely carved ivory whales.

"If all this will bring good luck," Tim said as he drew on the headpiece, "I'm glad to wear it. If you have anything more that will help matters along, trot it out." Privately he believed the easterly wind that was blowing would be vastly more potent than a hundred foxtail tips.

Paddles rose and fell steadily as the craft skimmed toward the point where the whale had last been observed. It probably wasn't there at all, Tim reflected, after they had searched awhile. But it was! They saw it blow an hour later and Tim bellowed from force of habit, the age-old cry, "Thar she blows!"

Suppressed excitement charged the umiak. The paddles moved swiftly leaving tiny whirlpools in the craft's wake. Tim's blood tingled. He had killed many a whale—for bone and oil. But this monster meant food. The kill was vitally important, and that knowledge was running through Tim like an electric current.

He achieved calmness with an effort. The whale spouted and the vapor drifted across the grayness of the lead. The natives were shouting now as they drove the umiak forward. The craft closed in and Tim got ready to fire a whale bomb.

The bomb was made of brass, ten inches long and an inch in diameter. The triangular point had three cutting edges and the head an eighth-inch projecting rim. Tim had the gun loaded; he aimed carefully at the huge black body, balancing himself, and fired. An instant later he was cursing the gun in his hands.

"Something jammed!" he yelled hoarsely. He looked back at the chief. "Keep the umiak in close—I'll have this fixed in a minute or two."

He took down the gun and stared at the parts. His face went suddenly white with anger. Someone had smashed two of the parts with a hammer, then carefully replaced them; the damage could not possibly have been an accident. Tim dropped gun and parts on the bottom of the umiak, promising himself that he would make use of this evidence.

"YOU take Eskimo harpoon," the chief suggested. "It no go broke." Tim picked up an ivory-headed harpoon to which was attached a seal line. Floaters, made by inflating complete seal skins, lay handy. These, attached the harpoons, would prevent the whale from sinking.

The natives sent the umiak alongside with a rush. Tim stood up and then drove the harpoon in with all of his strength behind the blow. The head went deep, and with a tail sweep that all but struck the umiak, the whale sounded. The seal line, carefully coiled, fairly smoked as it streamed over the bow. Two natives had managed to sink floater harpoons into the carcass. The floaters vanished in a smother of crimson spray.

Tim cautiously snubbed the line and the umiak, caught up an ivory-headed lance and prepared to drive it home when the whale broke water again. Three strong natives tried to haul in some of the line to bring the umiak

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within striking distance. Tim looked ahead and swore softly. Young ice, five or six inches thick had formed on the lead, and the whale was towing them straight for it.

Tim dropped the weapon and caught hold of the line, passed it back among the crew, and got them to pulling in unison. "Thar she blows!" he yelled. Crimson vapor drifted from the whale's blow-hole, but there was plenty of life remaining. Tim reasoned that the whale would not go as deep, nor remain down as long this time. Its speed had appreciably lessened.

"Tell the boys to stay with it," he yelled over his shoulder at the chief, "I think we can get in another good lick before he goes under the ice. One more good lick is all we need."

Suddenly he saw the whale dead ahead in the clear, icy water. It was coming to the surface and it required all of the chief's skill to steer the canoe to a position alongside. "Stay with it! Stay with it!" Tim pleaded. "He's almost up." He glanced at the young ice —the ragged fringe cutting into water was dangerously close. "Now!" Tim yelled. He stood, with the lance poised.

Without warning, the whale went deeper. "Cut the line!" Tim yelled. A native caught up a white man's ax, and his companions let go the line. Twice the native struck at the line dancing over the gunnel. The third time, the ax slipped from his hands and splashed into the sea. The line went over the side in a hopeless snarl, slipped as the loops closed up and became knots, then tightened.

The umiak's bow struck the ice and crumpled. A split second before the line parted, the stern pitched upward, spilling men and equipment over the ice and into the water.

Tim struck on his head and shoulders with stunning force. He staggered to his knees and tossed a line to a struggling native. Others hauled the man out of the water, then pulled their unconscious companions to safety.

Tim looked up the lead. The ice bulged as the whale tried to blow once more and draw air into its lungs. The bulge vanished; then, a hundred yards beyond, the surface literally exploded. Slabs of ice and foaming water shot into the air. Again crimson spray floated in the air and slowly dissipated. The whale went on, leaving shattered ice and a bobbing sealskin floater behind.

Tim Banning searched amid the umiak wreckage and equipment for the whalegun. There was no trace of it. With its broken parts it lay on the bottom of the lead.

"You look after your wet men," he said to the chief, "I'm heading back to Barrow. And you can let it be known among your people that some white man broke the whalegun within the last twenty-four hours."

CHAPTER XIX

DEATH OF A REINDEER

TIM was conscious of the questioning gaze of whalers and natives alike as he returned to the settlement. Bill Ridley—and he was always sober these days—sauntered over and stopped him. "I suppose the chief is dining on whale fin and flukes tonight?" he drawled. Whale fins and flukes were the delicacies of the whale hunt in native eyes.

"On the contrary," Tim retorted, "Somebody jammed my whalegun. We lost a chance to eat red meat."

"That's one way of excusing a poor shot," Ridley growled.

"Where's the gun? The camp would

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like to see these parts that were damaged."

"What're you driving at?"

"This: When you say the gun was damaged, you're charging somebody here with what amounts to wholesale murder. It's pretty serious and you've got to back it up with evidence. I suppose I'll have to send word to my men that they won't eat red meat until God knows when. Unless—"

"What?"

"You've got a sled deer that'd help out." He nodded toward Old King Cole.

"He's worth more dragging a sled," Tim said.

"You mean the lieutenant's pet reindeer rates higher than a bunch of starving whalers." Bill Ridley's eyes were mean.

Tim swung away without answering. He noticed the man with the frozen face and a group of natives and whites were listening. He returned to his cabin and spread out a chart. A knock interrupted and he growled, "Come in!" As the door closed he said without looking up, "Well, what is it?"

"You're a bear with a sore head these days, Tim," Mary crisply told him.

"I'm sorry—I didn't know it was you. Sit down, Mary. You're the one Ridley who might cheer me up." Tim grinned briefly. "I'm expecting trouble, and your brother isn't helping any."

"His hate for you runs pretty deep," she said thoughtfully. "It's the one driving force there is in his character right now. Perhaps if a man has the strength to hate that way, he may have strength for other things. . . . Why are you looking at the chart—that part of the trek is behind you?"

"Here a man named Scalzo or someone else influenced Antuk to demand his rights as shaman. Here someone, perhaps Scalzo, released your dogs and tossed you in my path. You carried a note between boards that influenced me to send nearly five hundred deer over fifty miles of ice," Tim said.

He made another cross on the chart. "And here, as you know, Antuk predicted a native's death if he stayed near Arnaretauk during her travail. And he died and I had to bribe Antuk to get my herders to return. And here," he continued, again marking the chart, "wolves that had been freighted over the ice in cages were released to stampede the deer. Two natives were murdered and I was nearly shot by a man wearing an ermine parka hood." He made another cross on the lead, and told her about the whalegun.

"Who is doing all this?" Mary said. "I know you are crediting it to Bill. He's always around—or I am—when something happens. Where's Scalzo? Perhaps you think I'm dragging a red herring over the trail to clear my brother. But—where's Scalzo?"

"He's vanished without a trace," Tim answered. "I've had inquiry made. If he happened to be in these parts someone would have recognized him. Well, in the morning I'm going to hook Old King Cole to a sled, and hunt for that herd."

"Here's something that will cheer you up," Mary said. "It's a letter, or report, from the *Polar Night*. Pete's amputation is a success. He is eternally grateful. A native reported that the *Audacious* has returned and is undamaged."

"She has!" All the old hunger for the crack whaler of the Banning fleet returned. "If I could just get at her with men and dynamite," he groaned. "But . . . the fortunes of war. What are your plans, Mary?"

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"To stay close to Bill," she answered, "and back his hand to the limit. I must go now. I knew you would want to hear about Peter and the *Audacious*. Everything is well aboard the *Mary Ridley*, but we must have fresh meat."

"Surgeon Newton should show up there soon," Tim advised her. "He'll make a thorough inspection. Please see that Bill carries out all of Newton's suggestions. Thanks for the report on Pete and the *Audacious*. Mary, you're a big comfort to me."

AFTER Mary had gone Tim went over the list of supplies he would need in his search for the herd. He planned to travel light, but at the same time take along sufficient food to insure locating the herd. "If I fail," he reflected, "I might just as well stay away from Barrow."

Fog was rolling over the ice when he turned in, driving those abroad to cover. As he lay stretched out on the bunk, slowly relaxing, the thought came for the first time that the eyes of the world were probably on the Revenue Cutter service. There was drama, such as the world relished, in the plight of the starving men, and in the task of their rescuers, who must drive food on the hoof through the Arctic in the dead of winter. There probably would be glory for the successful actors in that drama, but that angle left Tim cold. His only concern was finishing the job of feeding the men; then, with their aid, salvaging as much as possible of the fleet.

He awakened with a start and with the feeling he hadn't actually been asleep. But six hours had passed since he had turned down the lamp. Dogs were snarling in front of the door. "That's something that's never happened before," he muttered. "They've been too occupied looking for scraps of food."

He dressed and opened the door. A slaughtered reindeer lay on the steps and three native dogs were pulling at its hoofs in an endeavor to drag the entire carcass into the fog. They were half-wild brutes never at ease near a white man's dwelling.

With a sudden rush of hope Tim thought that the herd had arrived and this animal was a stray the dogs had pulled down. The creature had made its last stand in the partial shelter afforded by the cabin steps and a snowbank.

Tim beat off the dogs, afraid to make an examination lest they catch him off-guard and bring him down. But in a moment he noted something about the animal that sent a quick chill of fear through him. The deer's hide bore harness marks where the chafing had worn down the hair.

Then he was sure: The dead deer was Old King Cole. But how had he got out of the shack? Tim had repaired the shack and banked it up with snow for the express purpose of protecting the deer from dogs. Now he stood staring down, aware that he had been very fond of tough, reliable Old King Cole.

Abruptly he reached down and turned the deer over. The animal's throat had been cut and it had been cleaned, ready for skinning and quartering. "That's Bill Ridley's work!" Tim exclaimed, "and I'm going to take it out of his hide right now."

He started through the fog and was almost to the Ridley camp before he cooled off and his good sense returned. He could prove nothing. He was convinced that Scalzo had not killed the deer or wrecked the whalegun; but Tim wasn't forgetting that he had accused Bill Ridley of killing his two herders and had been forced to back down. So

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he started back, telling himself that if it weren't for his uniform, he'd have taken a punch at Ridley's jaw before now.

He returned to the cabin and dragged Old King Cole's carcass inside. The animal's presence was depressing. Tim swore with the utmost feeling, carried the carcass outside and hung it beyond reach of the dogs. "He was just as faithful as any dog," Tim muttered.

THE camp aroused itself as soon as the fog lifted, and within an hour the word had spread that someone had slaughtered Banning's deer and left it on his steps.

Presently someone knocked and when Tim answered he found three men facing him with an odd mixture of respect and determination. "We hear you've got fresh meat, sir," the leader said, "and we've come to get our share."

Before Tim could even make a decision, Bill Ridley barged into view. "We've just learned you've fresh meat, Lieutenant," he said, "and we're here to remind you of your promise—the first fresh meat goes to Ridley whalers."

"Get back where you belong," the first man snarled, "That deer's ours." His companions clenched their fists in their mitts and half-advanced.

"I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to the lieutenant," Bill Ridley retorted. "He's in command here, or so he claims."

"That was the agreement, Ridley," Tim said. "Take the carcass and get back to your ship." He walked over to the three men, determined to gain the upper hand of the situation and keep it. "Return to your quarters," he ordered. They hesitated and Tim's voice hardened. "What's your name?" he asked the leader.

"Tyler, sir," the man answered. "Of the Ridley fleet," he added. "Bill Ridley was promised the first fresh meat. And to get it he killed your deer. If that's the way to get what is needed around here, we'll know how to act from now on."

"Just a minute, Tyler," Tim said sharply. "Will you swear Ridley—"

"I won't swear to it, because like everbody else I was asleep last night. But if he didn't kill it, who did?"

It was Tim's own line of reasoning, but he didn't say so. "That will be settled in time," he answered.

"It seems to us you're putting off settling a lot of things. First the busted whalegun, which cost us red meat. And now the deer." Tyler's defiance increased as his confidence grew, and wrongs that were real and imagined grew rapidly larger. "Come on, boys," he growled.

The trader hurried over, greatly agitated over rumors of trouble. The natives, he reported, had given much of their winter's provisions to the *kabloonas,* or white men. They were afraid the white men, long under-nourished, might rise up and take their remaining food and leave them to starve. "Are you still determined to leave and hunt the deer, Lieutenant?" the trader asked as he finished his report.

"I'll stay," Tim answered. "This unrest has flared up so quickly, it looks to me as if it might have been organized. I had promised Ridley the first fresh meat, and I had to go through with it. When I made the promise I assumed the herd and not Old King Cole would supply the meat."

"Are you well armed?" the trader asked. "If you aren't, I can supply you with ammunition."

"It won't come to gunplay," Tim replied. "We can't let it!"

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"They may give you no choice in the matter," the trader suggested. "But I'm backing any play you make."

While Tim expected trouble, he went about camp as though the prospect of difficulties did not worry him. The cancellation of his trip to search for the herd was explained in Old King Cole's slaughter. He let it be known he would make up a dog team as soon as one of the teams came in from a stranded whaler, and would then leave the settlement.

Shortly after noon the trader appeared. He was accompanied by two Banning masters and three whalers from the Banning fleet. "They're marching on you within an hour," the trader informed Tim. "And they are determined to force you to make concessions."

"And we are here to lend a hand," one of the Banning masters added. "Tim, you're going to need help."

"Perhaps," Tim admitted, "but we can't make it look like this is a Banning group fighting Ridley whalers. You go back to the trading post and keep out of it."

"If they get rough we'll hop into it," the master insisted.

"You'll do nothing at all," Tim answered, "even if they get out of control. And that is an order."

The Banning men followed the trader back to the post. "He sounded like old Sulphur-bottom when he told us to clear out," one of them said. "It's too bad the old man ain't here. He could pull off his wooden leg and quell one half of the mutiny while Tim was putting down the other half."

"And when that was done," a second said, "old Sulphur-bottom would like as not try and lick Tim just to keep in his usual fighting trim. But just the same, I don't like it. If Tim can pull through with a whole hide, and the damned deer arrive, then he'll be free to save what's left of the Banning fleet. He owns the *Audacious.*"

"And my *Wanderer* and your *Aleutian,* both lost," the first master said. "I'd give me right eye if Tim could save the *Audacious,* just so it would keep old Sulphur-bottom awake nights. He thought she was gone or he'd never have deeded her to Tim."

They entered the post and closed the door, then wiped the frost off the windows so they would miss nothing that might transpire in the next hour or two.

CHAPTER XX

MEET THE MUTINEERS

MOBS were pretty much alike, Tim reflected as he watched the crowd of whalers move slowly toward his cabin. There was always a leader or two who had some courage. The others were rank cowards. If their victim was pulled down, they turned into wolves eager to taste blood. But if their leaders were beaten, the crowd turned coyotes.

Tyler was the spearhead of the mob. He was followed by a slim individual who had shipped on a Ridley whaler as supercargo. A half-dozen burly whalers formed the barb behind the spearhead. The supercargo handed Tyler a list.

"First," Tyler said, "are you sure a reindeer herd is on its way here?"

"It is. And due any day now," Tim answered.

"After that, what happens?"

"The deer are slaughtered as needed. When the ice goes out I plan to salvage as many vessels as possible," Tim answered. "I've been over all this before. It shouldn't be necessary to repeat details. It is now April. The Revenue Cutter *Aurora* should arrive as soon as

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the ice goes out. She'll stop at nothing to reach Barrow at the earliest possible moment. And she has everything needed in the way of supplies."

"Have you figured on the ducks and geese that fly over this region later on?" Tyler asked.

"We did, and brought ample guns and ammunition. A change of diet is important. We also have considered whale and walrus meat," Tim added. Somehow he felt he was playing into the man's hands. There was a satisfied glint in Tyler's half-closed eyes.

"With reindeer on the way, and the *Aurora* loaded with supplies, there's no reason why we should be on short rations," Tyler said. "We are now issued seven pounds of flour, four of beef or pork, one of frozen caribou meat and one half pound of frozen fish per man per week. We get a little sugar, tea and coffee and a few ounces of potatoes, too. And once a week a quarter of a pound of beans. The salt beef and pork was stored up here nearly ten years ago, and it's frozen every winter and thawed every summer ever since. It hasn't much strength in it."

"That's true," Tim agreed. "The ration is insufficient."

The supercargo stepped forward and submitted a list of demands. Tim glanced at them and noticed they wanted an increase in everything. Tyler waited until Tim had consulted the list. "What is your answer, sir?" he asked.

"You are all Arctic men," Tim said slowly. "You know the reindeer may not get through. You've been told of attempts by unknown parties to stampede the herd. And such acts were attempts on your lives and mine. You know, too, the *Aurora* may not get around Barrow until August—and possibly the ice will turn her back. I am sorry, men, but I can't increase the ration at present. You will return to your quarters, immediately."

IT WAS a just decision. The supplies must be spread over a long period of time. If they were consumed and the deer or the revenue cutter failed to arrive, the men would be faced with starvation. A small party of white men and natives had forced their way slowly north in the teeth of the snow and gale. The Arctic had fought them remorselessly every mile, and it looked as if the Arctic had lost. But there was still the ice which could crush a ship in a few minutes, or push it south with the weight of its incalculable tons.

Tim saw that many in the crowd appreciated that it was a just decision, the only one he could make. And, yet there were others, a substantial majority, who were ready to gamble. They needed only a spark to prompt them to take matters into their own hands. And someone supplied that spark. "Are we goin' to back down, or fill our bellies?" a hoarse voice demanded.

"This is mutiny, men," Tim sharply warned them, "and you know the penalty."

"It can't be mutiny," Tyler argued. "My ship, and others would have been in Frisco now if the ice hadn't caught us."

"My shippin' time was over three months ago," another yelled from the back of the crowd. "How can a man mutiny if he don't belong to a ship."

"The rule is this," Tim retorted: "No man can be discharged on a barren shore. Each of you is a member of your ship's crew until she makes port or you are rescued by another vessel. That's all."

"The hell it is," the same voice growled. "There's one of you and scores of us."

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"You'd better keep in mind what's behind this uniform" Tim snapped. He tried to catch a glimpse of the troublemaker whose voice was curious and yet vaguely familiar. Possibly the man had disguised it. Fog was drifting in again making the scene dismal and unreal.

Tim's reminder sobered some. But the troublemaker yelled, "The uniform is just so much cloth unless there's something to back it up!"

"Let's run him out of camp and help ourselves," another roared. "Blow him down, Tyler," he added. "We'll fill our bellies."

A low growl ran through the mob. It wanted action. This dangerous, unreasoning anger had been firmenting during the long, ice-locked months; and now the men were savagely hoping for violence.

"You'd better control your men, Tyler," Tim warned. "Or I'll hold you personally responsible for everything that happens. You've had fair warning, and I've made due allowance for what you've been through. Order them to their quarters."

"Why should I?" Tyler muttered, as if he were arguing the thing with himself. "That man's right. What's the uniform without force to back it up? I ain't afraid of it, nor what's inside of it."

"Are you a man, Tyler, or a windbag?" the voice taunted.

The barb went home. It was timed perfectly. Tim looked beyond Tyler and into the massed faces faintly visible in the icy fog. The troublemaker with the vaguely familiar voice knew something of mob psychology in general and more about Tyler in particular.

"Get out of camp!" Tyler ordered. "We were gettin' along before the Government sent you. We can get along without you now."

"TYLER," Tim said slowly, "they've got you where you can't back down. You're carrying the whole mess of trouble by yourself now, and maybe you can't handle it. But I'm going to get at it through you, Tyler."

"What do you mean?" Tyler asked. And a hush settled over the mob. Tim did not answer. His eyes were roving over the men. He saw Brennan with his bandaged face, and others. "What do you mean?" Tyler repeated.

"Stay where you are!" Tim ordered. He called to Brennan and several of the strongest men in the crowd; they approached, led by Brennan, alert, suspicious.

"How would you men settle this?" Tim asked. "I represent one force, the Government. Tyler represents—mutiny. Some of you have forgotten what my uniform means. You need to be reminded. And if you can't respect the uniform, you've got to respect the man. Obviously, I can't beat you all, single-handed, any more than you can beat the Government I represent. So how would you settle it?"

There was a long silence. Tim broke it. "How would you settle it, Brennan?"

Brennan poked aside the bandages covering his mouth. "Settle it man to man," he said. "If Tyler wins, you turn the supplies over to a committee of whalers. If you win, then we go back to our quarters."

"How about it?" Tim asked the others.

"Brennan's proposition is fair enough," one said. And the others nodded.

All eyes were on Tim. "That's agreeable to me, except I'll never turn the supplies over to a committee, or increase your rations," Tim snapped.

"If you're beaten unconscious you

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can't help yourself," Brennan snapped.

"You men are referees," Tim informed them. "If help comes to Tyler from the crowd, you're to stop it. If help comes to me from any man, either from the Banning whalers or the trading post, you're to prevent it. I'm putting it up to you as fair and impartial men."

That appealed to them, Tim could see; and he was inclined to think he was not taking such a gamble as appeared on the surface. "All right, Tyler," he said crisply, "it's a rough-and-tumble finish fight. And I want you to understand I've got nothing personal against you. To make certain you won't later be charged with attacking a uniformed officer of the Revenue Cutter service, I'll take off the uniform and face you as Tim Banning."

He went into the cabin and emerged a moment letter dressed in mukluks, reindeer-skin pants and a heavy and a light fawn-skin shirt.

"Wait," Brennan said, as Tim faced Tyler. "Here comes Bill Ridley. Let's find out where he stands. As a whaleship owner he may be against you boys. Or he may be with you."

Tim lowered his fists as Bill came down the trail at a dog trot. "One of my men told me there was going to be a showdown," he panted. "I sent the team and Mary on to the ships and came back. The Bannings aren't the only outfit who look after their people. I'm here to see all the whalers get a fair deal. This is my fight, Tyler. And it's been a long time brewing."

Tim might have mentioned interfering with a Government officer and the penalty attached. But as Bll had said, this fight had been long in brewing. Besides, it wouldn't be an impersonal fight and Tim knew there'd be more behind his punches now.

"You are representing the whalers, Ridley?" Tim asked.

"You heard me!"

"But did they?"

"He's good enough for us," Tyler shouted, and a roar of approval came from the crowd. Bill Ridley was a tougher man physically than even the huge Tyler.

"I'll wait until you catch your breath," Tim said. "I don't want you crying around that I caught you when you were winded from a hard run."

"I didn't run far," Bill answered. "We had a heavy sled load and were mushing slow."

He walked slowly back and forth, realizing the importance of a brief rest. But he did not want to cool off—there was a big advantage in going into a fight with blood hot and muscles loose.

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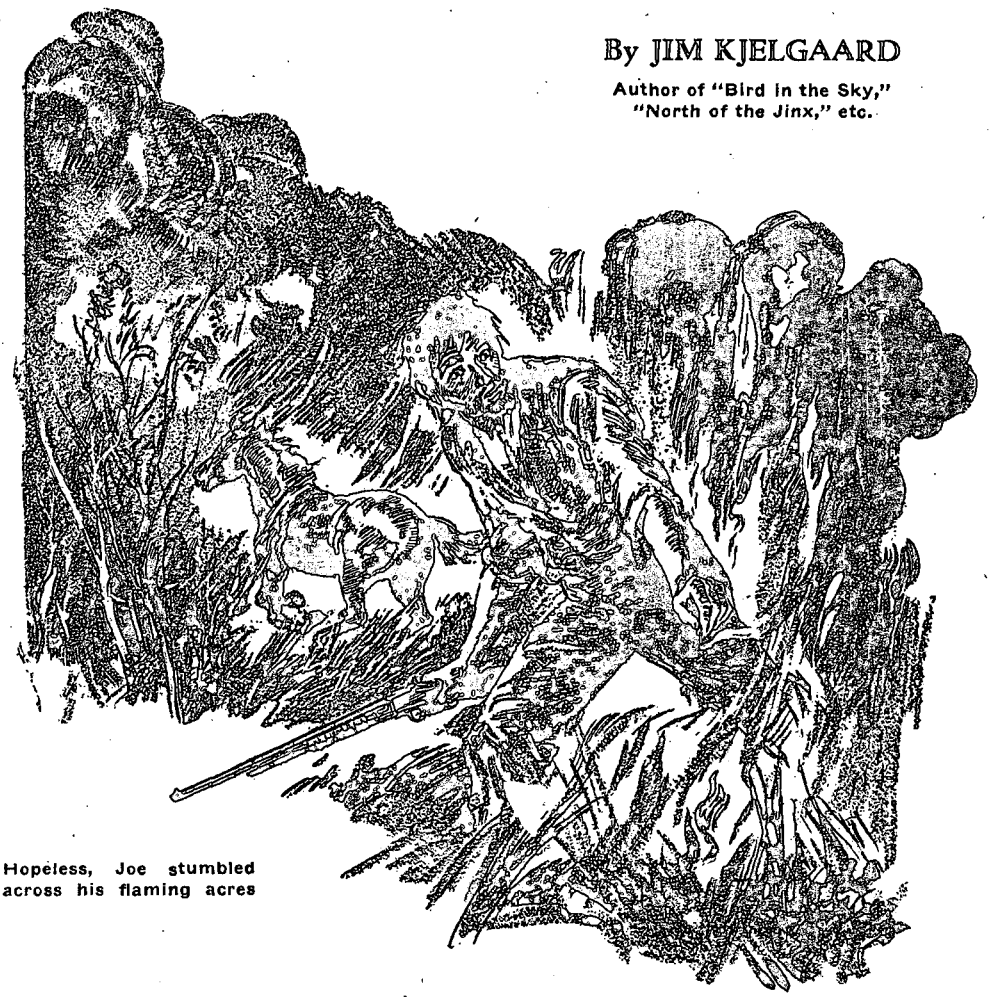
The Grass Grows Again

By JIM KJELGAARD

Author of "Bird in the Sky," "North of the Jinx," etc.



Hopeless, Joe stumbled across his flaming acres

Remember this, Joe Mardsden: No catastrophe, however terrible, can stay for long the breathing of the soil you love

THE Pennsylvania mountains were harash and hostile, yet as soon as Joe Marsden left the main valley and guided his cow and horse up Bitter Creek Valley, he sensed that here a man would never be asked to sign his life away for a bit of paper.

The heavy growth of beard on his face did not completely conceal the prison pallor in his cheeks. But he held his head erect as his glance embraced the bleak mountains that surrounded Bitter Creek.

He came to the place where the valley split, with a branch of the creek coming out of each. The left branch was wide, almost of river proportions, but the right was a narrow trickle.

Joe stopped, leaning on his rifle. He

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had paid one hundred dollars, the last money he had in the world after buying the horse and cow, for any hundred acres of land he might select in Bitter Creek. This was to be the place. The nose of mountain, coming down between the two creeks, leveled into a bench fifty feet above the highest possible spot the creek might reach in flood time. It would be a good place for his house and barn. Only scattered trees grew in either creek bottom. That would save him work in clearing, and bottom land was best.

Not that Joe expected a fertile farm here. Land which lay within five hundred miles of New York and sold for one dollar an acre in 1939 had to be poor. But on good farms a poor man had to work for someone else. Here everything he won would be hard won. But that was all right for it would be his.

Joe cast the lead rope from his Jersey cow. Heavy with calf, she walked into the sparse grass that grew in the creek bottom and began to graze. The horse rolled in an ecstacy of freedom when its pack was cast off, then began cropping at the grass.

Across the narrow right-hand branch of the creek a spray of lush green began a hundred feet up the hill, and spread until it was almost three hundred feet wide when it reached the creek. Joe's practiced eye swept it. It was a swamp, possibly a dangerous one. Horses and cattle could bog down and smother in swamps. He'd better look it over.

But this swamp was shallow. The mountains had springs in abundance, and there were several emerging from the base of this mountain that would keep the swamp always wet. Joe crossed and criss-crossed it several times. It was all right, there were no bog holes. He had nothing to worry about.

Then as he was emerging from the swamp, a bluejay flitted from its nest in the crotch of a low aspen tree and balanced on a limb ten feet away.

Joe approached the nest carefully. The bluejay dipped its head and bobbed its tail. Joe peered in the nest and saw there were eggs. Cautiously he backed away. He was with this country and of it now. He wanted to stay, to build, to find here what he had never before found anywhere. He would, of course, kill some things and trap some furs. But that was necessary for his own survival. There was a difference between using the birds and animals and abusing them.

The late May sun beat down hotly when he returned to the knoll where he had decided to build his house and barn. He unrolled the packs he had brought with him, and spread a section of canvas over two poles laid rectangularly over two more poles which were driven into the ground. Slowly and deliberately he made his bed under the canvas. It was to be his home until he had time to make a better one. He picked up a double-bitted ax and set to work felling trees.

The sun became pitilessly hot as it reached its peak and gradually began to descend. Joe stood erect and mopped his brow. He looked at the trees he had felled and trimmed, and knew a conscious glow of achievement. All his life he had worked hard, but always he had done someone else's bidding. Now at last he was doing something for himself.

The day waned. Joe sank his ax into the stump of a three and left it quivering there as he set about the evening chores. He milked the cow and watched her as she sought the coolness of the

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swamp. He caught the horse and stroked its smooth muzzle while he talked to it. The cow and horse were all the stock he had been able to afford, but he would have more.

Joe returned to the knoll and made a fire. He placed a skillet full of jerked meat over the fire, brewed tea in a tin can, and boiled a great kettle full of potatoes. A man who worked hard had to eat hearty. It was while the meal was cooking that he glanced down the valley and saw the man wading the broad left-hand branch of Bitter Creek.

Even in the crepuscular light, Joe recognized him. But he did not reach for his rifle; he made no hostile move. In two year's imprisonment he had forgotten all bitterness.

THE man was tall and spare, with a heavy black beard that tumbled about his chest and long unkempt hair that fell to his shoulders. Pale skin, strangely untanned by the sun, showed through his cotton shirt, held together with safety pins, and his ragged trousers. His feet were bare, but he carried an expensive repeating rifle.

But there was something about him not in harmony with his surroundings. Looking at this man, Joe knew that he lived in fear and had been frightened for a long time. Joe said, as he approached the knoll:

"Howdy, Wilse."

The man stopped, his rifle ready instantly to snap to his shoulder. Joe faced him calmly. Two years ago he and this man had robbed a store. After a lifetime of hard living, of never seeming able to get more than a few dollars at one time, Joe had set out after easy money, with which he could buy a farm. He had been caught and convicted. Wilse had escaped. One day, if he was ever caught, he too would face prison.

Wilse Cooper said gruffly. "What you doin' here?"

Joe read the man. He was a victim of his own mind, desperate at thought of losing his freedom. Yet, freedom did him no good.

"Maybe I ain't 'doin' what you think," Joe said easily. "I served two years for what we did. My brother died while I was in prison. He left me enough money for a stake. I brought this land and an outfit."

Wilse Cooper laughed, a cracked noise. "How much they offer you for turnin' me in?" he snapped.

Joe said, "You always was a damn fool. I was too, once. That's why I followed you. But now you're crazy. If you think what you did is so all-fired important to anybody that they're goin' to lay awake nights worryin' about it, you're cracked. I never told anybody about you, and I don't know whether there's any reward out for you.

"If you ever get caught, you'll come to trial. That's all right. But if you behave yourself, and don't bother anybody and keep hid here maybe nobody will ever bother you. I hope not. I'd hate to see anybody else go through what I did."

Wilse Cooper laughed again. "Why'd you come here?" he repeated.

Joe waved a hand toward the logs he had felled, toward the horse in the creek bottom and the cow at the edge of the swamp. "Because I got tired of plowin' somebody else's field and havin' them take the harvest I raised. Because I was crazy lollin' around wonderin' if anything in my life was ever goin' to be worthwhile. I came here to be a man!"

Wilse Cooper's little eyes gleamed

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behind the ragged mat of hair that covered his face. His mouth twisted, making his face suddenly malignant. He sighed, a long animal sigh.

"Listen," he said feverishly. "I know you're lying. You wouldn't come here to farm. But I've stayed in a shack up here for two years, and I ain't getting out now. Nobody but a few hill-billies knows I'm here, and they know what'll happen if they tell. I'll kill anybody who comes after me, and I'll kill you unless you get out. Get out! Start now!"

"I didn't even know you was here," Joe said. "But you can stay until Hell freezes for all of me. I'm stayin', and if there was fifty like you I'd still stay. I was born in a stable, and raised in an orphanage. I was bound out to a farmer who sweated the soul out of me. All my life I've been a hired man. This is the only chance I ever had, and I'm goin' to make good. Now *you* get out. Don't cross me again."

In one swift jerk, Wilse Cooper snapped the rifle to his shoulder. But as the gun moved, Joe leaped. He grasped the rifle barrel. Straining hard, the two men stood shoulder to shoulder for a space. Then, suddenly, the strength seemed to flow from Wilse Cooper. He released his grip on the rifle, and stumbled backward. Gasping, he faced Joe. He was a tree with a rotten core, that will snap all at once when the tough outer shell is broken. A wavering yellow gleam fluttered like shade in his eyes. He was a beaten man, but still a dangerous one.

Methodically Joe pumped the cartridges out of the rifle and thrust it under the canvas. The night had not brought coolness, but a chill of rage whispered up his spine. Almost, but not quite, he had been in a murdering passion then. He had to control himself. Murder could mean prison for the rest of his life.

"Get out!" he said. "Get out and don't come back. I'm staying here."

Dumbly Wilse Cooper looked at him. His eyes were strangely vacant, almost blank as he whirled to start back across the creek.

EARLY dawn brought with it an avalanche of heat. The sun hung over an eastern peak, a molten red ball. But Joe crawled from the leanto and entered the day feeling vibrant and alive. He went to the creek, stripped off his clothes and plunged in. The water was cold, with almost an icy touch. Joe laughed. It was a good country even though it was hard.

The green grass was shriveled, the leaves on the trees wilting under the furnace of the sky as he went back and set about the day's work. The floor of the forest, and of the creek meadow, was dry. There could not have been any rain for several weeks prior to his arrival, but that was all right. Bitter Creek Valley offered cold and heat, flood and drought—extremes of everything. But if Bitter Creek had been a desirable farming land, it would have been claimed, and he would not have been standing this moment upon his own land.

The cow moved listlessly out of the swamp when Joe went to milk, and as soon as he had finished, walked lazily back into it again. The horse stretched flat on the hillside having grazed its fill and now wanting only rest.

Joe dreamed as he stood with the pail of milk in his hand. Not for years would he have enough money to purchase more stock. But he could find some way of breeding those he had—Wilse Cooper had spoken of others in

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the hills who would have stock. For the first time since Joe could remember he felt entirely happy and unrestrained.

His place, his stock, his work! And all of it good.

Sweat rolled unheeded from his brow as he toiled with the ax. He lost himself in work. Every chip his ax bit from a tree was one step nearer his cherished goal. A barn that would winter his stock could be erected in two weeks. The house would take about as long, but first he must plant a garden. That notion took possession of him as he worked—to plant something and to harvest and keep it for himself. It was a wonderful idea.

At noon he threw the ax down and repaired to the creek bottom with the spade. A little wind fanned his face, and when he looked again at the sky, there was a single murky cloud in it. Contentedly he plunged the spade into the earth. It would rain soon, all things came to a strong man in a strong country. Memory of his many defeats faded and became dim as he made a garden.

It would not be easy.

The dry grass rustled and complained as he trampled it down, and the spade turned up thin earth that never would nourish corn higher than a man's head. But it could be fertilized, and it was his. When the garden was spaded, he smoothed it with a rake, and worked far into the night pressing seeds into it in long, even rows.

There were more clouds in the sky at night, and the wind was stronger. Joe sat in front of the leanto, staring into the gathering darkness. It seemed to him that he had been hundreds of years finding this place. Wilse Cooper was not going to drive him from it.

When morning came he hurried out of bed, and went eagerly down to the garden he had planted. The earth over it was hot and dry. Joe got down on his knees and peered carefully at each row he had planted. Nothing had sprouted as yet; it was absurd to suppose that anything had. Yet he wanted to see.

IN THE east, the sky was a yellow bank of clouds and the wind blew so steadily that it leveled the grass in the meadow. Rain would come on the wings of that wind but it might hold off for two or three days and Joe wanted to be sure of his garden. He carried pail after pail of water from the creek to the garden. It must grow. It had to grow.

And with it would grow the new Joe Marsden: confident and secure, with the right to be proud.

The cow was nervous and fretful when he drove her out of the swamp; she trotted back into it as soon as he had milked. Joe inspected her critically. She would calf soon. He had to watch her. He carried the pail of milk back to the leanto and covered it. He left it there to cool.

He felled trees all morning. The task became almost fascinating. From these logs, that had been trees, would spring a shelter for himself and his stock—realization of the dream he had always dreamed. There were many trees more than enough to build the great barn that would be his one day. Bitter Creek was not wholly bitter. Some things it offered in surfeit.

He did not glance up from his work. Consequently his nose first warned him that something was wrong. An alien scent, a faint something that should not have been there, tickled his nostrils. Barely conscious of it, Joe worked on. Then he looked toward the fire over which he had cooked his morning's

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meal. It must be out, he had put it out. He heard the horse scream, a rolling, blood-chilling sound of fear. Joe looked toward the meadow, to stand with mouth agape.

A thin screen of smoke was curling up from the meadow. It gathered volume. Flame, driven by the wind, roared up as he looked. Joe saw his cow, with tail held high, careen out of the meadow, struggle a second in a yellow sheet of fire, and go down. After that he saw the cow no more. He was suddenly, violently, sick. His horse pounded down the meadow to splash across Bitter Creek and gallop up the mountain on the other side.

He saw Wilse Cooper crawling across the meadow, stopping at intervals to throw another match down. Where the meadow met the side of the mountain, Wilse arose to shake a fist at Joe. Then he ran, scuttling up the side of the mountain toward a patch of laurel.

The flames gathered strength and breath as the blast they created met and mingled with the wind in the valley. A burning clump of grass arose to be whirled high in the air. It scattered. Piece by piece it drifted back to earth. A thin trail of smoke followed a burning bit back into the laurel on the hillside. Smoke poured up from there. A moment later the laurel was a white-hot bed of snapping flame.

Joe saw all that—and more.

Wilse Cooper turned to run back down the mountain. But the fire he had set had swept far down the meadow. Desperately he ran. Inexorably the fire closed the great pincer of flame between the meadow and the laurel on the mountain. The last Joe saw of Wilse, he was hopping, like a toy man, into a hanging sheet of smoke. He did not come out again.

FOR a moment Joe stood his ground. He saw this thing happening, but he did not believe it. Then as realization became complete, he thought wildly of getting a blanket, wetting it in the creek, and beating the flames out. But it was impossible. The fire had too great a start. And the cow was dead, he knew that. The horse had escaped, but the horse was less than the cow. Now that he had no cow to help him build his farm, he might never be able to buy another.

If it mattered, now . . .

The instinct of self-preservation asserted itself sluggishly. Wilse Cooper must have been a little mad. The wide branch of Bitter Creek was only a few hundred feet from where Joe stood. He could cross it easily and escape the fire. Wilse could not kill him with the fire in which he himself had died, but it might have been kinder if he had. Wilse had killed most of his dream, more important than life itself.

Dully Joe stooped to gather up the blankets, the canvas, the few utensils and parcels of food he had brought with him. He carried them, along with his rifle and Wilse's gun, down to Bitter Creek and threw them in. A trout left the open water and flitted for the shelter of the bank as Joe's shadow fell across the creek. Joe stared at the fish enviously. Life was so simple, so good to it.

Only when the flames were licking within feet of him did Joe wade across the pool. He sat indifferently on the other side, watching the fire. Two hours ago he had had everything, now it was wiped out. The curse that had been with him all his life would never be wiped out. He would always be haunted.

Above him, on the barren hillside where it had paused, he saw his horse.

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The horse, too was fortunate. It had no worries other than getting sufficient fodder to fill its belly. When the horse had thought it would be trapped by the fire it had known the depths of terror. But now that it had escaped all peril, already it was thinking of its belly again, beginning to crop the sparse shrubbery that grew on the hillside.

Well, that was all right.

Stolidly, Joe shifted his eyes back to the fire. He was crushed, but dimly thankful that the blow had descended in such overwhelming measure. It left no room for reproaches, resentment, self-denunciation. All he knew was a sense of bitter hopelessness. He watched the fire flare higher as it licked the outer edges of the logs he had cut, and smolder as it began to feed its vast hunger on their sap-wet cores. It raced through the green trees, nourishing itself on the dead leaves at their feet.

Leaving nothing.

In a billowing roll of yellow smoke, the fire reached the top of the mountain that rose behind the knoll where he had wanted to build his home. Joe had not yet had time to climb to the top of the mountain, but from the rapid progress of the fire after it reached there he knew that the top must be covered with laurel, sweet fern, and other waxy foliage that burned fast.

Then, like a sudden benediction, the rains came.

JOE sat unmoving on the banks of Bitter Creek. The rain had been falling for fifteen minutes, was pouring down with all the violence of a mountain storm, before he was aware of it. Stolidly he rose to his feet. He saw the rain falling in the creek, making the surface come alive with a barrage of heavy drops. The creek surged about his knees as he waded into it. Its coolness was strangely soothing, as if the water were offering him salve for deep wounds.

He did not need to go to the logs he had cut to know that they were destroyed. A mixed drizzle, half-mist, half-smoke, floated softly into the air from where they had been. The place where he had cut the trees opened like a raw wound on the hillside. He had brought his curse here. If he had not come, Bitter Creek would still be peaceful.

Yet there was one spot that the fire had spared.

The swamp was still green. He had last seen the cow running out of it and he found her scorched body, stiff legs asprawl, where she had fallen. He glanced at her soberly, meaninglessly and walked on into the swamp. It was strange, he thought he had figured everything, but never once had he thought that the cow would die one day. With eyes straight before him he walked on.

The fire had bitten gaping chunks out of the earth at the edge of the swamp. Little tendrils of smoke curled through cracks in the ground, betraying the flame that was still eating the roots deep in the earth. Joe walked around such places.

Then, at the very edge of the swamp, the bluejay hopped from its nest and flitted uncertainly to the crotch of a nearby tree. Joe stopped again. The trunk of the tree in which the bluejay nested was blackened and burned. A blacksnake, intent on robbing the nest, had been overtaken by the fire a third of the way up the tree and hung there in scorched stiffness.

But the bluejay had returned. Nothing had daunted it or kept it from its

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nest and all the hopes it had formed there. If a bird had that much courage, he himself could build again. It was a lesson to a hard man in a hard country. Joe looked wonderingly toward the bluejay; he followed its gaze, and saw the calf.

The calf was on the little knoll where its mother had abandoned it, standing on wobbly legs and looking at the earth around it with wide eyes. Joe approached it gently, and cradled it in his arms. It was hungry, but he still had the pail of milk in the spring. That would feed the calf until he could get more milk. The pelting rain washed the dead ashes from the creek meadow and revealed the green grass just beneath as Joe started toward the knoll where he would have his home.

It was surprising how quickly the grass would grow again after a fire.

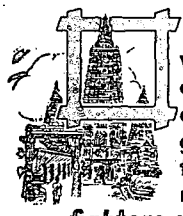
Bye Bye, Fat Guy

FAREWELL to those grand old days of the 'Twenties, when the rampant male surveyed his world in smug triumph, his foot on the neck of prostrate womanhood. Was it in the 'Twenties? Or—on second thought—was it ever that way at all?

"Civic Virtue," that massive hunk of stone that has adorned New York's City Hall Park for the last couple of decades, is on the way out; and his one-way ride will seem like the passing of a symbol. Known variously as Fat Boy, Tough Guy, and Cave Man, he represents a muscle-bound young man with a broadsword on his shoulder and his feet planted on or about a representation of the gentler sex, disporting beneath him.

Park Commissioner Moses wants to banish the Fat Boy to Randall's Island in the East River, where his athletic style will fit with the new municipal stadium.

—*Robin Townley*



OUT of the inner sanctums of a sacred lamasery, ***deep in the wilds of Tibet***, comes a mysterious hooded ***white man*** known only as . . . ***The Green Lama.*** Well versed in the mysticisms and strange secrets of the ***Oriental holy men*** this amazing gentleman devotes his life to fighting ***unscrupulous criminals that the Law cannot reach.*** His unusual and almost supernatural powers make him one of the ***most startling crime-fighters you have ever read about!***

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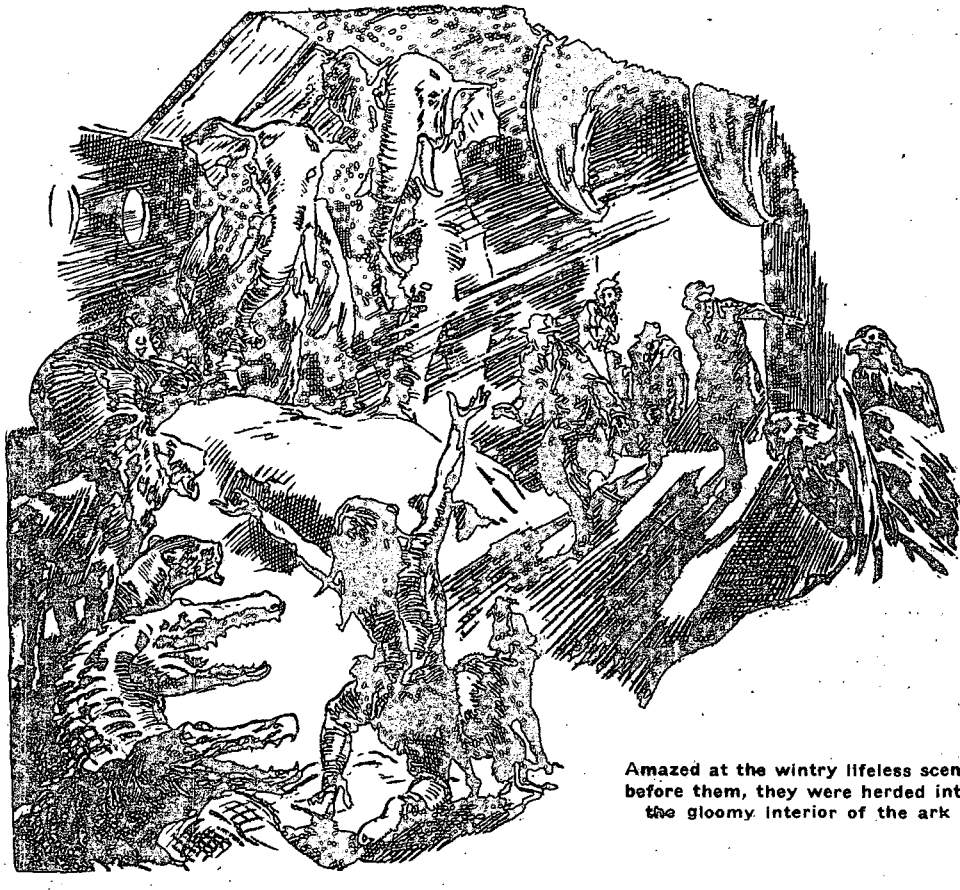
Then I'll Remember



Amazed at the wintry lifeless scene before them, they were herded into the gloomy interior of the ark

By CHARLES MARQUIS WARREN

Don't miss this astonishing story of how a man lost his world and a fortune, and fought through to capture them again

AMONG the crowds of late Christmas shoppers in a strange city, a young man wanders without direction, knowing nothing but the staggering pain in his head. Who he is, where he came from, where he is going—these are but questions tossed into a black void of dizzy, uncomprehending suffering.

In a mirror he sees himself without recognition—a man in his twenties, with wide shoulders, lean hips. Cheeks gaunt, black-stubbled, dirty; nose cut; left eye swollen and black. But the right eye—hopelessly, stupidly vacant.

Obscurely in his mind, the picture of a man bending over him, pouring some burning raw whisky down his throat. . . .

Things happen. Arrested for drunkenness and resisting an officer, he gives his name as JOHN SMITH, is lodged in jail over night. From the turnkey he learns the first clue to his identity. He is an important man. He has been visited—while still asleep—by one JOE KEHAWKIN, whose boss is no less a person than SAM BENELLI.

The first part of this two-part serial, herein concluded, was printed in last week's Argosy

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MEANINGLESS names—but somehow unpleasant. On his person is nothing but a copy of the New York *Times* for December 22. He searches this, finds an obscure story: a bank in the Bronx had been broken into; the night watchman abducted, beaten, and left in Brooklyn.

Nothing there, except—the job ha the earmarks of Sam Benelli's work. Benelli had been questioned, but had a perfect alibi. From the story he appears to be a powerful figure in the underworld. And it is with him that this man—this John Smith—seems to have been associated. The thought is profoundly disturbing.

But the man who bails him out in the morning is not Joe Kehawkin; and the gorgeous brunette who waits for him in a cab outside the jail is not the sort who would be associated with a man like Benelli. She is obviously concerned about John Smith; reproaches him for apparent indifference toward her. Bitterly she mentions a girl named BABE.

As they drive to a hotel, John Smith begins to understand certain things. He is in Baltimore. He has a great deal of money hidden away somewhere. And he is on some kind of a very, very unpleasant spot.

He stops on the way to buy another copy of the *Times* for December 22—a page had been torn out of his own. Now, on one side of the page he finds a picture of the first trans-Atlantic flight; on the other, a picture of members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion returning from Spain. Nothing there.

AT THE hotel, the man who bailed John Smith out reveals himself as a private detective named AMOS SYLVESTER; addresses John Smith as Mr. CORBIN. He announces that they have been tailed; herds John Smith and the girl into the bar while he goes to engage a room. And sitting there in the bar, John Smith—or Corbin—tells the girl that he has lost his memory, does not recognize her. She promises to tell him what has been going on, but is interrupted by Sylvester.

Alone in the bar for a moment, Corbin is accosted by two drunks who claim to have gone to college with him, revile him as a "gangster."

Acting on Sylvester's plan, he goes up to a room to wait for the detective and the girl. While he is there, a slinky blonde tricks him into letting her in; this, it becomes clear shortly, is Babe. Using all her blandishments, she tries to persuade him to split with her the two hundred thousand dollars he is supposed to have hidden. She also refers to the brunette—whose rival she appears to be—as ELLEN HAMMOND, a social registerite.

When Corbin puts her off, she picks up the room phone and summons the gang. A crowd swarms into the room: Ellen Hammond and Amos Sylvester; Benelli, Joe Kehawkin, a tall blond man named BLACKIE, and a healthy-looking fellow named CHUCK ELLIOTT.

Benelli's outfit are there for the payoff. Ellen Hammond protests that Corbin has been injured and does not recognize them; but no one will believe her. Chuck Elliott seizes her to keep her out of the way; Corbin pitches in against Blackie's gun; Blackie recovers from the punch and comes back at Corbin with an automatic, business end first. He squeezes the trigger. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

BROTHER NOAH

THE gun went off and the bullet skagged the ceiling. There was a sharp insect-whine as it ricocheted to the floor. The shot itself had been quiet. John Smith was surprised at the soft snap of its report. Probably no one in the next room, unless someone had been listening, could have heard it.

Blackie said, "Go fry, Babe," and shook Babe's hand from his wrist. She hadn't moved from her backless chair—just reached up. She glared at Blackie, her small chiseled features contorted like a defending tigress.

She said succinctly, "You dumb yap."

She got up and faced John Smith. "I didn't do it for you. You deserve it. You rate one in the stomach for being a doublecrossing chiseler."

Her breast heaved hard under the black caracul coat. Her honey hair looked well atop the blackness of the coat. Her eyes grew round with that strange wideness. "But half the dough you blew with belongs to me. You understand that? Sam promised me half of it—half of two hundred grand."

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She whirled on Benelli, her eyes glittering almost wildly as they caught the gray light from the window. "You meant it, didn't you, sweetheart? Didn't you!"

"Yes, Babe," Benelli said. "Shut up, Babe. Blackie, put that gun away. That wasn't bright."

"You see?" Babe glared at John Smith. "You heard what Sam said? I've never had dough like that. I've never been up like that. I've had clothes and my rent and maybe some presents from Sam and maybe one month having to hock the presents for a row of breakfasts, but never—"

"I said shut up, Babe."

"Now I'm going to have it. If you go my hundred grand goes with you because you're holding out, and somewhere you got it or you got somebody keeping it. But nobody's going to stop me from having what—"

The back of Benelli's hand slapped her across the mouth and she gasped and her fingers flew to her lips.

Amos Sylvester said, "I can see where this is going to be a very merry Christmas."

Benelli said to Ellen Hammond, "Your gag still rings phony to me. A guy don't come into the racket and then pull a doublecross on his first job. He knows better than that. That's suicide.

"So maybe a guy who knows better and still tries to pull a doublecross must be nuts in the head. So that's the way I'm looking at it. But there's a way to find out. Find out who's gagging who and who's going to pay for it."

He turned to Babe.

"Get Steiner on the phone. Herb Steiner. Tell him Benelli wants him out at the place in fifteen minutes. Tell him it's a medical examination. Tell him he's going to examine a head."

Babe thumbed through the directory. She still kept touching her lips with a finger. She had blinked the tears away.

Ellen Hammond said quietly: "Harmon at Johns Hopkins is the man you should call in. This isn't an elementary injury."

"Steiner's okay. He knows what goes on."

The girl put her hand on John Smith's arm and said soft-voiced, "The Annual Life is going to move after all. I went up to New York to tell you that. Does it mean anything to you?"

Benelli said sharply, "Never mind explaining things to him. He's supposed to've forgot."

She looked at John Smith gravely, but there were tiny flecks in her eyes which made him think she was offering this as a test. Babe's little act had done a lot of damage.

He shook his head slowly. "No."

Babe's voice droned huskily into the phone. " . . . yes, at the place. Benelli says fifteen minutes. . . . "

John Smith looked at his own black bag in the hunchback's hand and wondered again what was in it. He wanted to tell Ellen Hammond how he felt about getting her mixed up in this. He wanted to tell her not to doubt him: that he was certain he'd never had anything to do with Babe.

He began again feeling the need for some sort of inner explosion which would unbind the thongs around his mental hands and terminate this limbo of inactivity in which he stood up to his ears. His impotence maddened him. He wanted to do something, but had no choice except to follow their lead.

His head began to ache again, sharply and steadily, making him sick; and this time he was suddenly aware from the severity of the throb that it would not abate, but increase, and in

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a short while there would come weakness to make pain and necessity and consequence of no importance at all. . . .

THE limousine went inordinately fast for the condition the streets were in. It was after three in the afternoon and at present there was no snow falling. Plows had cut their ways over the streets leaving a fine veneer of snow that was freezing and rapidly becoming dangerous to chainless tires.

John Smith sat in the front seat of Benelli's limousine beside a hardboiled taciturn man who drove and whom Benelli addressed as Stony. John Smith's head was getting worse. It was an effort to keep his eyes open.

Benelli sat in back between Ellen Hammond and Babe. He kept looking out the rear window and finally said, "Let up, Stony. Joe's car isn't as heavy as this."

Stony slowed and allowed the sedan to come up behind them. Blackie was driving Kehawkin's car; the hunchback and Chuck Elliot sat on either side of Amos Sylvester in back. None of them, apparently, was talking.

Babe said, "It's going to be colder in there than outside."

"I got a watchman I pay all winter to do nothing," Benelli said. "He better have it warm."

John Smith turned his head slightly. "What's in that bag you said belonged to me?" Even to turn his head hurt. He wondered whether his skull was fractured.

Benelli said, "You're not supposed to remember anything and you're stuck with it. I'm not helping you with your gag."

He looked at Babe and then at Ellen Hammond. "That goes for both of you. I don't want either of you coming out with any hints. If he's faking, he don't need hints anyway. And if he's not—"

Benelli smiled. A queer, inward smile.

Stony said, "Can I get it up to fifty now, Sam?"

Benelli said, "Okay."

It wasn't much farther. They turned left off the boulevard and passed under an archway which had *Funland Park* written in Neon on it. The letters had the bleak smoky look of all Neon when not lit. It was crested with snow.

The park was large, apparently covering more than five square city blocks. It was absolutely deserted and under the fresh snow resembled some grotesque abandoned boom town.

There was the ferris wheel protected in canvas; the merry-go-round, boarded up; the squat building which housed the Caterpillar; the giant Fun House, unattractive and formidable with its garish pictures of clowns on the walls; clusters of small concession booths down the midway, with snow on their counters; the Coliseum which had a sign advising: *Roller Skating, Fights, Wrestling,* and a weather-beaten billboard advertising two Japanese wrestlers who had contended in a main feature last August.

Over in a far corner of the park the snow-draped skeleton of the Cyclone racer-dip thrust its network of scaffolding against the gray sky.

There is nothing, John Smith thought irrelevantly, so depressing or superfluous as an amusement park in the dead of winter. He wondered where they were going.

The tires whirled in the snow but Stony deftly maneuvered over a trackless road. They stopped on the far side of the midway before what appeared to be a fantastic reconstruction of Noah's ark.

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IT WAS single-decked. Over the rail of the deck an effigy of the patriarchal Noah was fishing. He was made of plaster and his shaggy hair and beard were sprinkled with loose snow. Animals stuck their heads from large portholes of the boat; the animals were in pairs in faithful adherence to the Biblical legend.

There was a sort of shallow moat encircling the ark; there must have been some water in it because patches of dirty gray ice showed through where the wind had thinned the snow.

At the tub's stern there was a rude gangway stretching up from the ground across the moat to the deck, and up this the last of Noah's collection of animals were in the act of boarding the ark.

It was odd, John Smith thought, to see a thin vapor of black smoke whorling from the solitary stack on the ark's roof. It was the only sign of life he had seen in the park.

Blackie drove the smaller car up and parked behind the limousine and got out. The hunchback, Amos Sylvester and Chuck Elliot followed. They walked over to the limousine. In spite of his overcoat, Sylvester was shivering in the cold.

In the limousine Benelli said, "Let's go. You come too, Stony."

They walked single file over a wobbly plank bridge across the moat and a door in the ark's side opened. A stooped, mouse-faced old man bundled to the ears in three or four cheap sweaters stood in the doorway.

"What's this?" he said querulously. He took a pipe from his mouth and peered at them. When he saw Benelli his voice took on respect.

"Howdy, Mr. Benelli. I wasn't expectin' you. It ain't often you get down—"

"Get out of the way, Hank," Benelli said. "It's cold out here."

"Out here it's too cold to be cold," Amos Sylvester said. "I wish I was in nice warm Labrador." There was no humor in his voice.

John Smith went first. There was a foot-and-a-half drop, intended as a gag, which jarred his head until he had to press his palm against it.

"Watch the step." he warned Ellen Hammond, following.

Inside it was gloomy but not oppressive. There was the damp smell of wet wood. It was cold. Some snow had drifted in through the open portholes. The floor creaked faintly under their feet.

They were in a sort of labyrinth cage, hemmed by iron bars. There was a skylight above and the faint light seeping through the film of snow on the slanting glass had a quality of duskiness which lent a macabre effect to the weird assortment of devices and figures inside the ark.

Scattered about were twin groups of every conceivable species of animal, so constructed that their heads and legs and tails could move mechanically and ponderously when the summer power plant was operating.

Some of them looked out the portholes. All of them stood under the watchful supervision of life-sized grotesquely formed figures which were evidently Noah's sons and daughters-in-law.

There were steps which moved in opposite directions simultaneously; a "cascade" from which water could fall at inconvenient intervals; holes in the floor through which compressed air would shoot up to catch unsuspecting females; and a ramp which led up to a door marked *Ark's Brig* and craftily guarded on either side by a devil's head

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and a skull, from the mouths of which smoke and soot could belch and envelop unwary entrants.

"Yeah," Amos Sylvester observed. "A very merry Christmas. For goblins."

"You talk too much, butterball," Blackie said.

"For not having my gun," Sylvester nodded, "I talk too much."

Benelli said, "Hank, get us out of this thing."

CHAPTER IX

GUINEA PIG DIES

THE watchman finished locking the outside door and came back, moving unerringly to two flexible rubber bars and stretching them wide enough to permit passage. Unaware of their existence, a person could spend hours searching for a way out of the maze.

"I can never remember which ones they are," the hunchback said pleasantly. It was difficult for him to pass with grace through the crescent-shaped gap the pliant bars made, and the watchman, endeavoring to make it easier, pulled harder and lost his grip on one of the bars. The rubber snapped with stinging alacrity against Kehawkin's misshapen back.

Super-sensitive rage transformed the face of Benelli's lieutenant. A sharp whine issued from his thin lips and he pounced at the watchman, the long nails of his bony fingers raking Hank's face.

"Clumsy lout!" he shrieked. He had a gun in his hand and it pointed at Hank's forehead.

Benelli's hand gripped the bony wrist, gently forced it down.

"Easy, Joe," he said soothingly. "He didn't go to do it. He's just an old man."

"Nobody makes a clown out of me!" Kehawkin screamed.

"Mr Kehawkin. . . " Hank's face was mottled liver. "Sake o' Heaven, sir, I didn't mean. . . "

Some of the glare went out of the hunchback's eyes. There was a crepitant rattle in his throat as he swallowed. "All right," he said, lavishly pleasant. "All right."

"There has been," Amos Sylvester commented tonelessly, "more attempted murder and more politeness about it this afternoon than—"

Blackie hit the detective hard in the face with his elbow and said, "You been askin' for it again, butterball."

Sylvester's split lip had deflated. Now it puffed again. He tasted blood on the tip of his tongue. He said earnestly:

"From now on I'm interested in you. Each night before I go to bed I'm going to pray beside the bed. I'm going to ask for one crack at you. Just one crack."

"You went to bed for the last time last night, butterball."

The watchman had preceded them down a narrow corridor. He stopped before the single door and pushed it open.

"It's warm in here, Mr. Benelli," he said. Fear of the hunchback was still on him and he was shaking.

They went in. An oil lamp fanned a saffron flickering over the room. There was a small table piled high with cheap magazines. There were three or four chairs and over in a corner a mussed bed. A wood stove, its pot belly bright red from the fire within, gave out a warm but close heat. The smell of Hank's pipe was offensive.

Babe dumped her caracul coat and flung herself on the bed. Her eyes were bright and avid.

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"Now," she said huskily. "Now we're getting somewhere." She looked at John Smith and her lips curved. "You started remembering yet, honey?"

John Smith was remembering something else. Kehawkin's unwarranted outburst of fury. He understood now how a hunchback could rank as a lieutenant in Benelli's mob. In the grip of his sporadic insanity nothing but death was relevant to Kehawkin, and human life became the means of blotting out his humiliation.

Ellen Hammond took one of the chairs and John Smith stood behind her. The hunchback placed the black bag on the table and sat down. The others strung themselves about the room. Benelli stood under the solitary window, a small rectangle close to the ceiling. He was watching the snow which was sprinkling lightly again.

"Doc Steiner is late," he said.

The watchman was staring at John Smith. He ventured timidly, "I ain't seen this one for some time. Not since—"

"Save it, Hank," Benelli said. "He don't remember being here. I don't want him reminded."

The old man bobbed his head with nervous haste.

"Yes, Mr. Benelli."

"Or do you begin to think?" Benelli asked John Smith.

"I can think. I can't remember."

"We'll see. Doc Steiner'll see."

Babe said, "I hope you've been kidding, honey. For your sake, honey."

There was the muffled sound of someone rattling a door. The watchman got up, looked at Benelli.

"Go with him, Blackie. Make sure it's the doc."

In a few moments they returned with Doc Steiner.

"SORRY I was late, Sam," Steiner said. "It's no fun driving these roads." He was a tall man, thin-boned, with a long angular face and lank black hair. He put his bag on the table "What is it, gunshot?"

"No. It's got to do with not being able to remember."

"Then you don't need a doctor. You need strongarm."

"He says something happened to his head."

"Oh. Which one?"

Benelli pointed. Steiner went over and looked at John Smith.

"Amnesia maybe, eh? You know that word? What makes you think you can't remember? Let's hear your symptoms."

John Smith told him. He didn't like Steiner's manner. It was the slack professional manner of a lawyer who has been disbarred but who has gone on making money. It was empty arrogance. He had to tell Steiner twice about the pain in his head.

Steiner said, "You don't look like an amnesia victim to me. Your eyes don't. Let's have a look at you."

To John Smith the examination was cursory and inadequate. Steiner listened to his heart, tested his reflexes, made him repeat inane numbers and sentences. His fingers explored John Smith's skull, roughly. He muttered something about no synaptic retractions and finally said:

"Your skull's not fractured. I can tell that without an X-ray. That's the only thing could be wrong with you. And it's not fractured."

John Smith was sore. "How can you tell? You're so used to treating nothing but gunshot you wouldn't know anything else. I believe you're a quack."

Steiner's thin nostrils contracted in

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anger. He turned swiftly to Benelli.

"Do I have to take that from him, Sam? Who is this punk?"

Benelli said, "You sure about what you said, doc? He's okay?"

"There's no fracture. And anybody with a little sense can fake loss of memory. I'll stake my professional reputation—"

"What's left of it," John Smith said. He was getting angrier. His head hurt like hell.

Steiner set his bag on the table again. He doubled his fists and walked over to John Smith.

Chuck Elliot came between them. "I wouldn't do that, Doctor Steiner. He can get rough. He's screwy."

Steiner hesitated, appraising John Smith's size.

"Anyway, there's nothing wrong with this man. He's been smart enough to put one over on you."

Benelli said, "Okay, Herb. You've told me what I want to know."

Something in Benelli's tone caused John Smith to swing around quickly and look at him.

BENELLI had a gun in his hand. There was a bloodless anger in his face, and only his eyes were alive.

John Smith realized, looking at the yellow-centered bleakness of those eyes, that Benelli's suavity was a pose the man adopted to humor his own conceit. Thwarted, and with a gun in his hand, Benelli became something not nice to see.

It was the first time John Smith had seen Benelli with a gun. It did something to the man. A gun made it understandable how he could be top man in his racket. Through the woodenness of his lips, Benelli's voice was edged:

"So it was the doublecross, honeymouth. You were going to sit tight till things cleared up and then remember you had a quarter of a million bucks waiting for you to kick around."

Chuck Elliot suddenly whimpered. "Honest, no doublecross on my part, Mr. Benelli. I'm telling you the truth. Honest to—" His healthy face was livid with fright at what he saw in Benelli's eyes. He screamed: "I wasn't in on this part! You know it! I didn't—"

"I don't know it."

"I didn't know he was gonna cross us up after—"

"Shut your face," Stony growled.

Benelli's eyes bored into John Smith's.

"I'm not asking you any longer. I'm showing you what happens to bright lights like you who pull fast ones that're not so fast. We don't knock banks off for the fun of it, honeymouth. And the dough is maybe a little warm and we can't use it right yet. So that makes me show you what happens to crossers. I don't mind showing you."

John Smith hardly heard. His mind was grasping at a solitary word: honeymouth. It meant something to him; something recent. It came to him with a dull impact that he had been called "honey" not as a form of slang or mock affection; but that it was an abbreviation of Honeymouth—and he had come across that same sobriquet somewhere during the last twenty-four hours.

If it would come to him—

It did. It clicked into place like a latch on a gate, because it was something he didn't have to dig into his empty memory for. The New York *Times*. He had merely glanced at the brief flash but his memory retained enough detail for a starter.

Honeymouth Corbin. The revelation

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startled him but that was all. It furnished nothing more than an identity, and he needed more. Needed it badly.

Benelli was saying quietly, " . . . let you get away with this gag and have the laugh on me whenever you want to wake up. If you don't come across you don't go on breathing. And it's going to take something to show you I don't kid, honey."

The gun in his hand was a woman's small automatic. It was almost pretty and it did not tremble in his hand. It pointed at John Smith's abdomen.

From the bed, Babe said, "Wing him, sweetheart, where it'll hurt. Don't kill him."

John Smith said quickly, "You want me to start remembering. Maybe I will. Let me see what's in the bag that belongs to me. Maybe that will help."

IT WAS a long chance. Perhaps an impossible chance. But he had a little to go on now. Honeymouth Corbin. Maybe the contents of the bag would explain or lend a clue to what they wanted. At any rate, here was an opportunity, if only for a moment, to unhook the ring they'd had through his nose. For the moment he wasn't being led; he was leading.

"You don't need help," Benelli said. "You know what's in the bag."

The hunchback had moved to the table and opened the lid of the bag. His bleak grin was enigmatic. "Just what you left," he said, glancing at the contents. "You didn't leave much."

John Smith took three deliberate steps to the table and looked inside the bag. Its contents did not startle him. By now he was used to surprises.

The gun in Benelli's hand leveled at John Smith's back. "You're still stalling." His finger began to contract on the trigger.

Ellen Hammond screamed, "No!" She started forward but Stony caught her, held her roughly by both arms. "You can't kill him. He doesn't know!" Her voice was high with the information she intended giving. "Tell them you're John Corbin who—"

Stony placed one hand behind her head at the nape of her neck and clapped the other over her mouth.

"No you don't, sister," he said.

John Smith said quietly, "Don't try to help, Ellen. They'll get rough with you if you try."

Over Stony's thick hand he could see the surprise in her eyes. He wished he could tell her that Babe had mentioned her name in the hotel room.

The hunchback said to Ellen, "So he didn't know who you were?" and chided her with his thin laugh.

Benelli lowered the woman's automatic. He said, "This is how it is, Chuck, come over here."

Chuck Elliot detached himself from the shadows of the wall and moved to the center of the room. He was cringing. His eyes were wide with fright.

"You're going to be a guinea pig, Chuck." Benelli's voice was like his face: expressionless. "You're going to show Honeymouth why it's not good to doublecross and why it's good to remember."

"No, Mr. Benelli!" Chuck's healthy red face was blotched with liver-gray. "Ahh. . . no! I didn't have no part in this. I didn't know . . ."

"You had plenty of part. Right here in my park when you had him as a comer in the prelims. You told me when you had him ready he'd be right. He'd play along. You made a bargain. That was your part. And so that nobody doublecrosses Benelli and makes a habit of it, you got to be a guinea pig, Chuck."

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"No!" Chuck screamed. "Please!" He sobbed hoarsely and started to go down on his knees.

Benelli fired and it caught Chuck in his left knee and he straightened up sharply and cried, "That's enough! You done enough, please. . . ."

But Benelli fired again, the pretty automatic making a small sound only slightly louder than someone *pffitting* tobacco from the tongue.

A delicately round hole appeared in Chuck's forehead and his eyes shot up as if to catch a glimpse of the hole and he fell forward stiffly, reflex action causing his hand to grasp futilely at his left knee. He lay on his stomach, his face turned so that his chin rested on his left shoulder.

He wasn't bleeding yet. His face didn't look so red and healthy now.

Amos Sylvester gave vent to a softly audible whistle. "Merry Christmas to you, Chuck."

Over Stony's hand, Ellen Hammond's eyes were closed. She wasn't crying. On the bed Babe carelessly uncrossed her legs and grinned at John Smith. She had that look in her eyes.

"Honey, I can see you beginning to remember that dough."

Benelli said coldly, "Hank," and indicated Chuck's body. Laboriously the watchman dragged Chuck by the legs and placed him in the shadows alongside the wall. He made Babe get up and took a dirty sheet from the bed and spread it over Chuck.

CHAPTER X

AND NOW THE GIRL—

UNTIL the shooting, John Smith had been abstractly fingering the contents of the black bag. They fitted in with Honeymouth Corbin's identity, but offered nothing more.

There was a faded brown robe; a pair of blue silk shorts with a brilliant red stripe at each seam; lightweight composition-soled shoes and a pair of boxing gloves stained with resin and streaks of dark congealed red.

He looked now at the still form under the dirty white sheet and then at Benelli. There was a stricture in his throat which came partly from fear but mostly from uncertainty. The pain in his head was stupefying.

"Now," Benelli said, turning to John Smith. "Now." There was a narrowed wildness in his yellow-centered eyes as if he had just discovered what an intoxicating business killing was. "Now you. You've seen. Start talking or—"

"Easy, sweetheart," Babe said. She got up from the bed. She was frowning at the look in Benelli's eyes. "Easy. He knows what we don't."

John Smith tried one of the gloves on his right hand. He didn't know how to start when there was still nothing to say. The stuff in the bag hadn't helped except to confirm what he'd remembered from the brief sports flash in the *Times*.

His head was hammering relentlessly. He saw the small muzzle of the automatic trained at a spot a little above his stomach. A coldness seemed to turn over inside him at that spot. He felt something crinkle against the palm of his hand inside the glove.

"Yeah, he knows what we want. But if we keep him alive and he don't give, he don't help us any more than if he's dead. You're going to be dead in three seconds, like Chuck, honey, only not so easy, if you don't start talking." The way his eyes glared it was almost as if he hoped John Smith wouldn't start talking.

John Smith took off the glove and put it back in the bag and from be-

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hind the protection of the open lid, looked down at his closed hand. He had no trouble unfolding the piece of paper.

"Two," Benelli said softly.

"No, sweetheart!" Babe cried, moving swiftly toward John Smith.

Benelli said, "Three!" at the same time John Smith said, "I'll tell you about it," and Babe flung herself in front of John Smith, gasping, "Sweetheart, don't be a—"

The gun made the same quiet sound. Babe closed her eyes and swayed a little. There was a dark liquid patch on the blue dress above her left breast.

Benelli swore and tried to catch her, but missed. Amos Sylvester took advantage of Blackie's disconcerted vigil and dived at him. Stony released Ellen Hammond and kicked at the hard-packed little detective's shins. Amos said "Ohh!" and Blackie swung around and exploded his left against Sylvester's cheek.

Amos staggered back, said disgustedly, "You and your fist. You're running up quite a debt."

Blackie hit him on top of his head as hard as he could with the barrel of his gun. It made an ugly sound. Sylvester wheezed "Aahhh," and slipped to the floor.

BENELLI knelt beside Babe. Her head dropped gently against the crook of his arm and she looked very soft, like a child asleep. One small hand was closed over her left breast. Her honey hair caught the light from the lamp and mellowed it. When the strain left her lips she did not look unhappy.

Benelli rocked her a little, handling her like a doll. He looked up at John Smith and there was nothing human in his eyes. He said to Babe, "Angel, keep on breathing. You got to. Don't forget about the dough. More dough than you've ever had in your life."

For a split second the hardness of his voice broke. "Don't stop breathing, Babe." He looked again at John Smith.

Doc Steiner knelt beside Babe and took an instrument out of his bag. "I knew it would be gunshot sooner or later. Put her down, Sam, and don't hold her so tight."

He unbuttoned the front of Babe's dress and probed with the instrument, not too gently. "It's a flesh wound. But deep. She's all right. But close to the lung. Those little guns can do some damage."

Babe's eyes opened and she got her bearings and whispered to Benelli, "If you kill him he can't tell us, sweetheart."

John Smith said, "I'm going to tell you."

He took a deep breath, held it. This was it. Nothing was concrete and there was no function of his memory. But this would have to be it.

Steiner carried Babe to the bed and got out bandages.

Benelli got up. "Talk," he said. He said it in a funny way, as a priest might say it to a man who has less than three minutes to live.

"The loss of memory was a fake." He didn't look at Ellen Hammond, who had sunk down on a chair and was watching him dully, her chin in her hands. "Naturally I know who I am and what I've done. I tried to be smart, and it didn't work. I'm John Corbin, so-called Honeymouth because I happen to be a college man in a racket where correct English is considered bad taste."

"Never mind the six-bit gas," Benelli said. "We know who you are." He said it as if he had made up his mind what to do, and there were only an

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element of waiting to be got over before doing it. He was stroking the pretty automatic.

John Smith spoke quickly, as if reciting an incantation by rote.

"You wanted me to throw the fight for the championship, and when I wouldn't do it; you made sure I'd lose by having Blackie strongarm me with a lead pipe a few minutes before the fight. Naturally I didn't last a round with the champ and you won two hundred grand, even naming the round. You didn't lay out your bets, but made them in cash. For some reason you had the money brought to my dressing room immediately after the fight—"

"You know why," Benelli said softly. "You weren't going to squawk to the cops or the commissioner if it looked like you'd done some betting on the champ yourself."

"Blackie came into the dressing room to collect—"

"Yeah," Blackie said, "and when you were gonna turn the money over to the commissioner and blab, I said no, and you argued with a lead pipe."

His hand flicked at the scar on his forehead. "Sam, I told you this louse made me write that thing. Then when he's getting dressed, I come up behind and hit him with my heater and he goes all screwy and I say you're getting out of town till we let you know—"

The hunchback said, "And he outsmarts you and takes the suitcase with the dough and you're stupid enough not to notice the difference of the bags."

"I'm telling you the louse was acting so screwy I didn't notice nothing. He's taken a beating three times on the head already, twice by me and once by the champ. He's saying something's happened to his head and flopping around like he's punchdrunk. I know if he stays in town the reporters'll see him like that and—"

Benelli interrupted impatiently, "All right, so you were dumb and put him on the train for Baltimore."

"That was his home once, wasn't it?" Blackie retorted sullenly. "I look in his pockets, but there ain't anything in them, Chuck always carrying his stuff when he fights."

Benelli said to John Smith, "You're still stalling. We know what happened as well as you do. You don't need to tell us. What did you do with the dough? That's what counts."

FOR a moment the only sound in the room was Babe's strained breathing as Steiner pressed cotton and gauze against her wound.

John Smith unclamped his teeth. This was to be his clincher, his gamble. He felt the tight breathless wonder a man feels who has let his hole card remain a secret even to himself.

"I was pretty hazy after the fight. I guess I took a few too many coming down on the train. I remember checking the suitcase in some department store down town when I began to feel I was going to pass out. I don't remember which one, but I'd remember the inside of the store."

He waited. Babe made a wincing little sound. Blackie growled: "You checked a quarter of a million bucks in a department store!"

Without looking up from his gun Benelli said, "This was your home town once and you don't remember the store?"

"I'd had plenty to drink. The desk sergeant will tell you that."

"That's right," Kehawkin said. "The cop who brought him in said he was so drunk he couldn't walk."

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Benelli said slowly, "And now you think I'm going to let you go there and find the suitcase and take the chance of raising hell and getting the cops out here. No. You're not bright. You've done your part, honey. You're not even a little bit of use to me now. We'll find the department store afterwards. You got to be another guinea pig like Chuck, honey."

Over the pain in his head John Smith's brain struggled to function. "You found out I didn't have a check. They said they'd recognize me. Anybody else would have to identify the contents. They'd investigate when they looked at those contents."

Babe said weakly from the bed: "Sweetheart, you said I'd get—"

"I know, Babe. Don't talk, Babe."

"And he might . . . still be lying. If you kill him and . . . we find out he's been lying . . ." Her voice tapered off. She was weak and the wound hurt her. "Please, sweetheart. You said . . ."

"It's all right, Babe. I've figured a way. I've always got more on the ball than the other guy, Babe. You know that."

He walked over and stood very close to John Smith.

"You see my face, honey? It don't look so good now, does it?" He tapped his finger under his eyes. "The eyes ain't pretty now either, are they? They got a look in them."

His voice grew soft. "That's the way a guy looks when his girl is shot. I look like that. That's how I feel. It ain't a good feeling. And mine was only winged.

"You're going to look a lot worse than me. You're going to look as lousy as you're going to feel. Because if anything goes wrong, honey, you're going to know, like me, how it feels to have your girl shot. Shot maybe two or three times, once every ten minutes, say. With time enough in between for her to think what a swell guy you are.

"And I can do it. I'll attend to it personally if there's any slip-up."

He nodded to Blackie and the hunchback.

"You two go with the Honeymouth. Keep your eyes open but don't try to stop him if he pulls anything funny. That's what he wants. But you just let him pull and scram back. That's the way it is. Let him go to the cops. By the time they get here there won't be anybody around. Except maybe her."

He jerked his chin towards Ellen Hammond. "And she won't be talking much."

Babe said weakly, "You're smart, sweetheart. You're real smart. He won't pull anything phony now." She smiled at Benelli. "Thanks, sweetheart."

CHAPTER XI

WHAT PRICE COP?

IT WAS almost four-thirty and the first streaks of darkness hovered just above the roofs of the houses that lined the boulevard. The snow was crisp.

They were using the smaller car. John Smith sat between Blackie, who drove, and Kehawkin, who had taken out his gun and was looking at it.

"Sam is smart." The hunchback smiled. "That's why he's on top. This is the first time the racket has given anybody an open door to the cops—if they want to use it. Shall we let you off at the nearest corner so you can call the law, honey?" He laughed.

"You're very funny." John Smith wouldn't think of Ellen. He counted on Kehawkin. It was risky; it was the only way.

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He could feel the piece of paper in his pocket. It was valuable. It had already given him his only break. He could remember it almost word for word, the hastily scrawled confession with its scrambled legal phraseology.

He must have forcibly dictated it to Blackie. It was crude, but it made sense, and it had furnished a springboard for what strategy he could employ. It went:

I, Daniel (Blackie) Leonard, confess to assaulting John Corbin with a piece of lead pipe immediately before Corbin's championship fight in an attempt to force Corbin to throw the fight, which he had refused to do.

I also confess to returning here to the dressing room after the fight to collect the money bet on the champion because of effect of assault on Corbin, and do confess to sending Chuck Elliot from room and forcibly resisting Corbin's attempt to turn over the money to the commissioner.

[Signed] Daniel (Blackie) Leonard.

That was all. But it was enough, combined with a few expository hints dropped by them before, for him roughly to reconstruct what had occurred in the dressing room.

And the confession had been written on a piece of newspaper which was obviously the missing half-page of the *Times* he had carried in his pocket. It was scrawled upon the whiteness of the sky in the photograph of the first trans-Atlantic flight. He had probably shoved it for safe keeping into the glove, then, after Blackie had hit him, had picked up the wrong suitcase. In his condition he'd never known the difference.

He wondered where that other suitcase was. . . .

"How far?" Blackie said.

"Keep on going. Downtown, I told you."

"All you gotta do is holler, and we put you out and scram. You ain't thinking of nothing?"

"No. There isn't any use thinking."

"You're wising up, honey."

The knowledge that he was a professional fighter brought no elation to him; merely relief that he was not a member of Benelli's mob. He understood now why the memory of the cop sprawling in the gutter with that look of stunned surprise on his face had persisted in haunting him.

It must have been a familiar picture to him, opponents bewilderedly prone beneath him on the canvas, if he had fought his way up to contending for the championship.

It was funny: he didn't even know the champ's name. The midnight edition of the *Times*, which had evidently been delivered to his room after the fight, had been on the streets too early to carry more than a brief sports flash which had run something like:

HONEY CORBIN BOWS TO CHAMP IN FIRST

Tonight the honeymouthed college man, challenger and favorite, put up an unexpectedly inadequate fight and went down for the count in two minutes and fifteen seconds of the first round of a scheduled fifteen-round main event. Detailed account to follow in extra edition.

He said to Blackie, "Turn right."

"I know where the department stores are in this burg. I come down here enough to collect Sam's take from the amusement joint."

"He owns the park?"

"As if you didn't know. As if you didn't know Chuck Elliot was hooked up with Sam when you was fightin' punks in the semi-windups out there."

"I didn't know about Chuck. I thought he was a legitimate trainer."

"You're full of sweetness and light."

"If I was favored to take the champ, how is it the papers haven't played up my disappearance?"

"That's the way you are. Never want publicity. They don't know you're gone. They think you're taking it easy somewhere till you get over the beat-

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ing you took. That's what Chuck give out anyway. And you wasn't such a favorite. Seven to five ain't so long."

"Nobody in this town recognized me. You'd expect them to recognize a challenger."

"Your own fault for never letting them news boys get any photos of you. That's one thing helped you, not wanting publicity. It ain't often. Listen, for what am I spieling things you already know? You still playing that game?"

Blackie's jaw thrust out and for a moment he took his eyes from the street ahead.

"We're almost there. It won't be a game when you have your money, will it?"

Those drunks in the Belvedere Hotel —they'd been the only ones to recognize him. Something about going to the same college. They had probably seen the fight. They had probably bet heavily on him and taken his loss as a personal affront, laying his unexpectedly easy defeat to the usual theory that fighters sell out to racketeers whenever they lose.

He recognized the corner; said, "Stop here."

It was as congested as it had been yesterday. Christmas Eve. Shoppers jamming the pavements in delayed last-minute rushes.

Blackie pulled over and parked in front of a curb that was painted red. Kehawkin put his gun away and said:

"So if we get a ticket we get a ticket and in traffic court there'll be a jam to see who can tear it up fastest when they find out whose car it is. Get out, honey, and remember we're not preventing any break you want to make. We just fade. I don't guess it would take her longer than half an hour to die, but that half hour wouldn't be pleasant."

THEY walked on either side of John Smith. They walked close together and people made way for them. The sky was the color of a dirty nickel. The first lights would be winking on in a few minutes.

John Smith held his breath again. His heart began to pound until it seemed to take the pain from his head. Then he saw him—not ten feet away, directing the traffic light from the control box on the corner. Relief and a grim excitement came to him. It was a long chance.

There was a little man wobbling uncertainly toward them, packages stacked high in his arms. John Smith didn't get out of the way. The packages went one way, the little man another.

"Clumsy as an ox," Blackie growled. "You dirty so-and-so!"

The little man was almost in tears. He picked himself up from the snow. People stepped around the packages, but one or two didn't see and stepped squarely on them. The little man's voice was trembly: "Don't stand there! Help me get them up."

"Pick 'em up yourself, bawlbaby," Blackie growled. He nudged John Smith. "Get going. You want the store to close?"

"Help me with—Don't step on those, *please!* Somebody help me get. . . ." Three or four shoppers stopped to smile, impeding the flow of sidewalk traffic.

It was then that O'Leary looked around, angry recognition flaring over his face. He snapped the control box closed and came over.

Blackie said guardedly, "Get going, honey, or we blow and Sam'll start to work."

O'Leary said, "So you're at it again?"

The little man was trying to retrieve

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his packages but they kept sliding from his arms. He was actually in tears.

"You big galoot! If I were your size—"

O'Leary's face was dark. He looked at Kehawkin.

"You come rubbin' it in that you got him off this mornin' an' nuts to me?" His generous mouth was an angry line. "You showin' off your connections? Well, I don't like big shots in big rackets, Mr. Kehawkin. I ain't impressed."

The hunchback was frowning but his voice was pleasant. "What gives, O'Leary? This has nothing to do with this morning. My friend here merely bumped into the man and that breaks no ordinance I know of."

The little man had successfully retrieved his packages and stacked them in his arms. John Smith grinned stupidly and lurched against him. The packages scattered over the sidewalk. The little man lost his footing, sat down hard and began to scream at the top of his voice.

Under the wind-whipped redness of his cheeks O'Leary's face was white. He grabbed John Smith by the arm.

"So you're not drunk and disorderly again?" He jerked John Smith toward the callbox, said over his shoulder to Kehawkin: "And you're not rubbin' it in. Try and get him out this time, Mr. Connections."

Blackie and Kehawkin followed slowly to the box, their faces sullen. O'Leary put through his call for the wagon, his hand on John Smith's shoulder. Blackie growled low-voiced to Kehawkin, "Listen, we don't want him—"

The hunchback shrugged. "Sam said no interference." He grinned bleakly at John Smith. "But you're dumb, honey. This was a dumb idea. Not smart. All you got is yourself in the can. And we got hurried business with Sam. He'll keep his bargain, honey."

John Smith nodded. It wouldn't do any good to shout to O'Leary what was happening in an amusement park Noah's Ark in the dead of winter. O'Leary was in no mood for jokes. Even if it didn't sound crazy, by the time O'Leary called men to investigate, Blackie and Kehawkin would have reached Benelli.

"Why don't you tell O'Leary about the bargain Sam's keeping, and where? O'Leary'll be sure to believe you." Kehawkin's voice was mocking.

O'Leary hung up, turned and said, "You two get going unless you want to get going my way."

Kehawkin said to John Smith, "Merry Christmas, dope. You're giving your girl a nice present."

He and Blackie turned to elbow their way through the crowd. It was almost dark, that moment of haziness immediately before street lights flash on.

JOHN Smith thought *here it is at last;* and reached out and slapped Kehawkin hard on the back and quickly withdrew his hand. The hunchback whirled around and John Smith was already grinning at O'Leary, asking: "Touching it for luck, O'Leary?"

Kehawkin gave a quiet thin cry and his left hand darted out, leaving four white lines in O'Leary's red face. The lines suddenly turned to wet red.

"You filthy, lousy . . ." Kehawkin's breath took away his words.

O'Leary said. "Holy saints!" and reached for the hunchback. Kehawkin's face was livid. He screamed with that abnormal sensitive rage John Smith had remembered. He evaded O'Leary's heavy hand and once more his nails raked the red cheek. "Nobody can make a clown out of—"

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The crowd backed away, sensing something. O'Leary lost his grip on John Smith and raised his night stick at Kehawkin.

"Cut this out, you little rat."

Blackie said, "Not here, Joe! We got to get back—"

But Kehawkin had the gun in his hand. His eyes held the light of that strange humiliation.

The gun went off. Two or three women in the crowd screamed. They stumbled over each other getting out of the way. O'Leary sagged to his knees on the sidewalk, holding his left hip. He had his gun out.

John Smith made a break through the crowd and they parted, breathless and terrified, too stunned to move for themselves. He had a glimpse of Blackie forcing his way through the ring of people on the opposite side.

He headed out in the street, called a cruising cab. As he got in he heard two more shots, the screams of several women, and then a thin nasal screech that stopped abruptly and that had come from the hunchback.

He gave the driver the name of the amusement park. The cab made the traffic light and the driver said, "There's nothing out there now, buddy, unless you're gonna go for a ride on a icicle." He laughed heartily.

Smith crawled over the back of the seat and sat beside the driver. "Here's a ten for getting me out there faster than you think possible."

The cab spurted suddenly, took the middle lane and the driver said, "It's Merry Christmas or maybe I live right."

John Smith looked back. He couldn't see any sign of Blackie's car. "You carry a gun in the cab?"

"So help me no, mister, not me!" The driver was startled. "What—"

John Smith opened the compartment at the right of the dashboard, felt around. Under a dirty cloth he felt the gun. He took it out. It was a .38 automatic.

"Maybe it doesn't do for a cabby to be honest," he said. The cabby looked frightened. "This isn't a holdup. But get this car moving."

The speedometer needle touched fifty. The chains slapping the fenders made one continuous roar. The car was beginning to skid a little. The street lights came on, looking feeble and dull in the half-light between day and dusk. The snow was very white.

Blackie's car caught them in the empty stretch of boulevard just before the amusement park. John Smith climbed in back and broke the rear window with the butt of the gun.

"Keep it moving," he said. Blackie was driving like a madman. He was rapidly closing the distance between them.

He waited until Blackie's car was within thirty feet and then fired at the right front tire. He fired twice and missed. Blackie started to cut out to the left to pass. When less than ten feet separated the two cars, John Smith aimed carefully at Blackie and fired.

CHAPTER XII

SO LONG, BUTTERBALL

THE windshield in front of Blackie starred very suddenly as if a thrown snowball had burst against it. Blackie leaned forward against the wheel and abruptly his car dropped away, spinning crazily around and around like a horizontal pinwheel in the middle of the boulevard.

It straightened out finally, rolling slowly in the opposite direction. A curve in the boulevard prevented John

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Smith from seeing whether Blackie got out or the car started again.

Under the arch at the entrance to the park, he put another ten dollar bill on the seat beside the driver and said, "Now move."

"Watch me, mister," the driver said and the cab darted away.

There were no lights in the empty park but the darkness was not yet complete. He followed the tire tracks through the deserted midway and then circled about so that he came up to the ark from the rear.

By peering around the blunt stern he saw that the limousine and Doc Steiner's car were still parked in front. Thin smoke came from the stack on the roof of the ark. There was no other sign of anyone.

Cautiously he made his way up the stern gangplank, stepping carefully around the ascending pairs of zebras, deer and tigers. The snow deadened the sounds of his footsteps as he stepped onto the narrow deck.

The pain in his head had come back, a beating, rushing pain. Ellen Hammond was inside, and with her were Benelli, Stony, Doc Steiner and the watchman.

He glanced over his shoulder toward the midway. There was no sign of Blackie. It was getting too dark to make sure. Maybe Blackie was still sitting at the wheel of his car, not minding the cold.

It had been his plan to enter through the skylight in the roof, but after hoisting himself up and precariously crawling through the banked snow, he found himself unable to pry the skylight loose. To break the glass would be to make a sound. He slid back to the deck, his mind working but getting nowhere.

In front of him the heads of twin giraffes, their brown eyes meek and unwinking, protruded from a porthole. The port was large enough for a man's body, if he could break off the long necks. He reached out, grasped one.

It seemed to shrink from his touch and the long neck and head disappeared. In a moment it bobbed back. That was the way it worked in summer when the power plant was on, these animals' heads bobbing in and out.

He pushed both heads down, propelled himself headfirst, awkwardly, through the port. He thought he heard the hoarse shout of a man somewhere in the emptiness of the park, but he was in no position to make certain. Holding tightly on to one of the giraffe's backs, he pulled himself through, let his feet fall slowly and softly to the floor.

It was dark, only the dim light sifting through the skylight giving the interior a nebulous substance. He could make out objects, but not in detail. There was silence.

He was halfway up the ramp which led to the door marked *Ark's Brig*. He guided himself carefully down the ramp and stopped suddenly, taking out the driver's automatic, the flesh at the base of his neck beginning to crawl.

There was the sound of harsh breathing not two feet from him.

HE waited, his body taut, his eyes accustoming themselves to the darkness, and then he saw the figure of Amos Sylvester lying on its back inside the barred cage. Evidently the watchman had dragged him there, thinking him secure.

He remembered the approximate location of the flexible rubber bars. Patiently he felt until he found them and stepped inside the cage. Sylvester was unconscious. He tried softly slapping the relaxed face, the limp wrists; Sylvester stirred only slightly.

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There was nothing else he could do. The sopor would take its natural course. It would have been reassuring to have the little detective beside him as he stepped out of the cage again and groped his way down the darkness of the corridor.

He paused outside the single door. There was muffled talking inside the room. A murmur of words, then silence, and the murmur of a reply. Ellen Hammond wasn't speaking. He would have heard her voice, no matter how indistinct.

He set himself. There could be no wasting time. The voice he thought he had heard out in the midway — it wouldn't take long for a man to stumble through the snow, reach the ark.

Again, as excitement tightened his senses, the pain in his head seemed momentarily to diminish. His left hand groped for the door knob. There were four men inside; he could hope to take only one or perhaps two, at the outside by surprise.

He wondered if Ellen Hammond would retain presence of mind enough to keep out of the way. He wondered if she were in there at all.

Benelli's voice suddenly swelled. "What's the hold-up? It's been an hour. Stony, take a look outside. Stay there till they come."

There was the scrape of a chair and footsteps came toward the door. John Smith pressed back against the opposite wall of the corridor.

For an instant the light from the room framed Stony's figure in the doorway and then John Smith fired and moved forward so that until he was halfway into the room Stony's crumpling body afforded him a shield.

Ellen Hammond was bound to the chair she had been sitting on; there was a handkerchief across her mouth and tied at the back of her head. Her eyes were wide, frightened.

Benelli sat on the edge of the bed beside Babe. Steiner and the watchman sat at the table reading magazines.

It took only the fraction of a second for Benelli to come to his feet, his gun in his hand. He was swearing very loudly.

Steiner threw the magazine in John Smith's face. Ducking, John Smith stumbled over Stony's body and sat down. Benelli's shot went over his head by two feet.

Babe screamed.

Steiner leaped at him and John Smith's bullet caught him in mid-flight but it didn't interfere with the impetus of the leap. Steiner sprawled across John Smith's knees like a heavy flour sack dropped from a great height. He took Benelli's next shot between his shoulderblades and although his body shivered he never felt it.

The old watchman kept saying "Oh," over and over again and sat frozen to his seat, the magazine still open in his hands.

Benelli moved warily around to get a better angle for another shot and John Smith fired twice, awkwardly, from his sitting position under Steiner.

Benelli raised his hand to fire and then his head dropped, the gun clattering on the floor, and a ripe red miniature gusher began to drench the whiteness of his shirt to the left of his tie. He said softly, "Ahh . . ." and fell forward quite slowly on his face, lying still.

Babe screamed again.

JOHN Smith pushed Steiner off him and got up. He felt he should shake himself, as a dog does coming out of water, but the motion would send the pain exploding in his head again.

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He walked over to Ellen Hammond, picking up his feet delicately as he walked, and took the handkerchief from around her mouth and bent over stiffly and untied the heavy cord that bound her hands and ankles. He said wearily, "Thank the—" and stopped as her eyes did not look at him, but over his shoulder, and were round and bright.

He didn't need to be told. He pressed the trigger of his gun as he swung around, but the flat click signified he had already pressed it too many times.

Blackie stood in the doorway and Blackie didn't look unusual except that his face was almost the color of his platinum hair and his left hand clutched at the right side of his chest. His trousers were caked with snow up to the knees and there was snow plastered up the right side of his overcoat where he might have fallen full length on his side.

Blackie's half-smile was ugly. He said weakly, "You . . . you . . ." and fired.

It took John Smith alongside the temple and things that were black were white, and white things became red. He couldn't move. He was tired.

Blackie took his time steadying his right hand, waiting until the gun covered a spot on the bridge of John Smith's nose. "This time . . ." he said.

And then he stumbled forward into the room as if shoved roughly, and growled, swinging around and trying to aim at Amos Sylvester. Sylvester came in, hit him in the jaw, toppled him, and then took Blackie's gun out of his hand and hit him three times on the side of the head as hard as he could. The last two times were unnecessary.

The watchman said "Oh," and finally closed his magazine. Babe started to scream again but it tapered into rough sobbing. Ellen Hammond was abruptly at John Smith's side trying to hold him and steady his swaying motion.

Amos Sylvester said, "The louse stepped on my face coming through. He stepped on my face and it woke me up. For that I'm grateful he stepped on my face. It's the last time."

He looked fondly down at his handiwork and said, "From now on my interest in you is washed up—butterball."

He looked at John Smith. "I'd have come along sooner, but looking in the dark for those rubber bars in that birdcage—" Then he hollered, "Hey, wait!" and started forward to catch John Smith, but it was too late.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE OTHER SNOW

FROM time to time the coma would slip away from him and during those short moments he had noticed the cool whiteness of the walls and ceiling and of his bed.

The first time there had been two nurses, a graduate in white saying to a probationer in striped blue: "He's been moved from the psychopathic ward to this private room. He's Dr. Harmon's case. Harmon says he's no nut. Take good care of him."

The second time he could make out Ellen Hammond sitting beside his bed. There was the pulse throbbing under the fair skin of her throat as she kept patting his hand and anxiously watching him.

"Honey," she kept saying. "John . . . honey."

But he couldn't answer. He couldn't answer anybody. Sometimes he could hear what they were saying to him and when he'd open his mouth there'd be the pain in his head and an insensible darkness.

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Dr. Harmon was a tall man with finely-grained wrinkles and a thatch of white hair. He always stood at the foot of the bed where it was easiest for John Smith to see him, and he'd talk gently to Ellen Hammond, mentioning words like:

". . . not retroanterograde, Ellen. That is very ugly sometimes. That is when your brain switches recent events into the remote past, and things which occurred in childhood seem as if they happened yesterday. That is a bothersome affliction, Ellen.

"But your young Corbin is a victim of retrograde only. Because he can remember no details at all since his attack. And retrograde is not quite so ugly, Ellen."

And because Harmon very carefully did not mention a return to normality, John Smith lay quietly in bed and knew that he wasn't any better and that the wound at the side of his head had brought no restoration of cosmos from confusion.

"Shock seldom brings back the normal function of the brain, Ellen," Harmon's quiet voice would say almost in answer to John Smith's thoughts—or had he babbled them? "Shock tends to deaden, not awaken. It is a popular misconception—a sudden shock and everything is all right. It happens in twenty cases out of ten thousand. This is not one of the twenty, Ellen."

But there was comfort in the confidence of Harmon's kind smile.

They talked to him. Once Amos Sylvester's face floated grinning in front of him.

"What a party in that ark," Amos' voice said. "That cab driver brought cops and cops and after O'Leary winged Kehawkin downtown, O'Leary brought more cops. By the time Miss Hammond and I had got you into the car there was enough cops to hold the annual policeman's ball in the ark. . . ."

And then Ellen's voice, soft: "He can't hear you, Amos. You'd better go."

But he'd heard. He'd heard most everything Ellen and Amos had said. He knew Babe was going to live; he knew Benelli lived long enough to make statements which Blackie had confirmed.

Benelli and his outfit had been over knocking off that bank the night of the fight, and that was why Blackie alone had come to the dressing room to pick up the money.

He knew a lot of things, from listening, but the knowledge didn't serve him. You can't erect a building on a foundation of deep murky water.

THESE things he learned through his ears and so he knew them: he'd come out of M. I. T. an embryo architect and wanting to marry Ellen Hammond and having much ambition but little else.

He'd waited for a job in Baltimore which promised to furnish a springboard to greater things, but the company had put off building and what resources he'd had dwindled during the waiting.

Unusually apt with his fists at college, he'd thought it a way to survive during the interval, and Chuck Elliot had taken him over, built him up within a year and a half to where he could rap at the champion's door.

And Chuck Elliot had been connected with Sam Benelli. That's how the way to the champ's door had been paved so quickly for him, though he'd thought it simply his own prowess in the ring.

He'd turned down Benelli's offer of a huge cut if he'd queer the fight; he'd turned it down through Babe, whom

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Benelli had sent to work on him, whittle him down.

Babe had come many times to his room at the hotel; and the once he had admitted her, Ellen — coming unexpectedly to New York with some news for him—had walked in and gone away, hurt. He knew that because Ellen, sitting at that great distance across the white bed, told him about it when they were alone, and asked him if he remembered. He couldn't even tell her that he didn't remember. He could say nothing.

And after the fight, Ellen remembering Babe and Babe's torrid words, flung in the hotel room: "I got more right here than you have, baby. I got the right of Sam Benelli!"—remembering those words and becoming alarmed at not being able to see John Corbin.

And searching for him, and hiring Amos Sylvester who promised not to let the police in, and who, by nosing around Grand Central, Pennsylvania Station and the B. & O.'s junction at Columbus Circle, had subsequently put them on his trail to Baltimore.

He knew all these things as a child knows its lessons, from the telling; but he couldn't substantiate them.

He slept without sleeping. But he was deriving strength from merely lying there. He could tell.

And then after a long time he seemed to wake abruptly, and looking out the window into brightness he knew it was a morning and there was the steady drip of melting snow.

He smiled and there was very little ache in his head. He seemed to be able to see and feel now, gossamer things that had been with him once and had faded for a time.

At times they would come back gradually in a sort of series of nostalgic, intoxicating waves, odd things like the delicate stone tracery and sweeping spires of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine which was Gothic, and the Lincoln Memorial which was Doric and more impressive and durable, and the Temple at Edfu.

He remembered, with no understanding, architraves, abacuses, triglyphs and entablatures. He knew them vaguely, but eventually they might become stronger and more tangible. At present he welcomed whatever came to him, gratefully, like meeting an old friend at night in some strange bright crowded city.

And there was the inclination to cry.

Architect! The word laughed at him. He knew no more now about architecture than he knew about prize-fighting.

THE melting snow beat steadily outside the window. Ellen Hammond was saying anxiously: "Those things you keep repeating. . . . It's coming back, isn't it?"

"It's much better." He didn't tell her how it really was. He was surprised to hear his voice work and he grinned at her.

"The man with the uniform cap behind the cage. I know now. He's the parcel-master in the station. I must have keeled over and he gave me a drink. A good stiff drink. I'd like one now. He said he'd keep my suitcase. Didn't give me a check, said I'd lose it. I could come for it when I felt better. It's there."

Ellen's tired face smiled at him. "The commissioner held up your purse pending an investigation. After all this I don't think they'll give it to you."

"I must have been pretty good." He kept grinning. "Maybe I could take another crack at—"

Harmon, at the foot of the bed, said:

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"Not any more." He smiled and touched the side of his head. "Not with that. You'll have to be content with architecture."

"You have money saved, darling," Ellen Hammond said. "And anyway the Annual Life is going to move and they need that new building. That's what I went to New York to tell you about. You have a fine job, darling. You'll be working under James Mansfield." Sparkle came into her tired eyes. "A fine job, honey."

He looked at Harmon. Harmon knew. You couldn't build without a knowledge of building. He hoped Harmon wouldn't give it away.

Harmon understood. He smiled. "These walled-off memories can't be kept impounded forever, you know," Harmon said. "They'll trickle through at first, perhaps. Then they'll come. They must." Harmon left the room.

That was it. He lay still and knew that one day—he couldn't be certain how soon or how distant—the face of the dam would give way completely and there would be an onrush carrying all before it.

"That will be it," he said.

She was looking at him.

"Then you'll remember," she said softly. She knew.

He nodded.

"We'll wait a little. Then everything will be fine."

"Yes. We'll wait a little." She took his hand.

Out the window it looked as if it might be through snowing for the winter. But it wouldn't be. It always snows once in the lateness of the winter.

THE END

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ARGONOTES

The Readers' Viewpoint

WE'RE crowded this week, as you can see. Here is Looking Ahead shouldering its way onto our page with no apology at all. We resent it, but we can't do anything about it. Anyway, there's only room for one letter—and a formidable technical affair it is.

Our correspondent suggests pleasantly that maybe we don't know anything about oil fields. Well, he's right; we don't. We never drilled an oil well in our life. We've dutifully studied the following letter—a sharp criticism of T. T. Flynn's "Lady Wildcat"— but probably if we ever have to deal with cable tools, we won't even remember to string them up instead of rigging them up.

J. H. BUZARD

I have just finished "Lady Wildcat," in the Jan. 6, 1940 issue of ARGOSY. May I say that the author, Mr. T. T. Flynn knows less about drilling a well than—well, take yourself for instance?

The story in itself is well written and the plot will pass, but the technical phrases are pretty bad.

For instance, I'll pay good money for a picture of an oil-field truck hauling three thousand feet of casing. It isn't heavy, but it's awfully bulky. When casing is run it is hung in a spidder. (Ed.'s Note: We think the word was *spidder*.) A ring affair with notched wedges that grip the pipe. Cable tools are strung up, not rigged up. And the drilling tools are called just that. And not drill bits. Individual pieces of casing are called joints. The platform is called the derrick floor. On a cable tool rig the crew is made up of a driller and a tool dresser who work six, eight, or twelve hours out of twenty-four. These shifts, by the way, are tours, pronounced "towers." Finally, a well is shut in with a control head or a master gate. Either of which should have been screwed on top of the casing before it was "drilled in."

Don't let me discourage Mr. Flynn. Tell him to keep it up. But for pete's sake tell him to brush up on oil country lingo and technical terms.

I make my living in this game and I've read ARGOSY for several years so I reckon maybe I've a right to blow off steam.

ALLEGAN, MICH.

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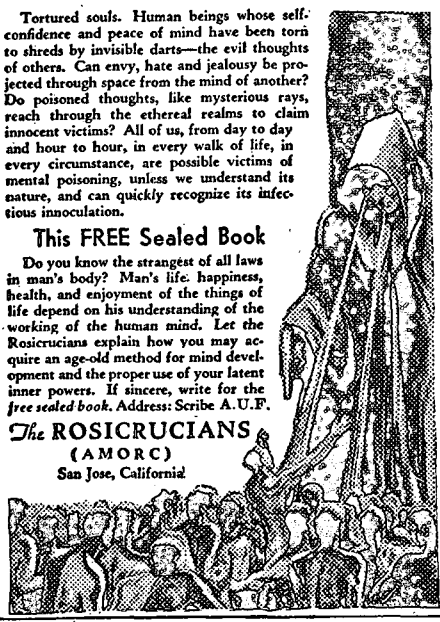

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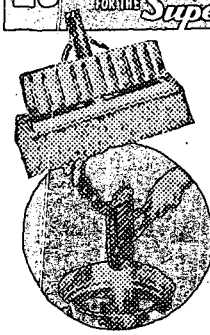

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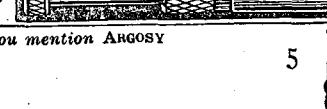

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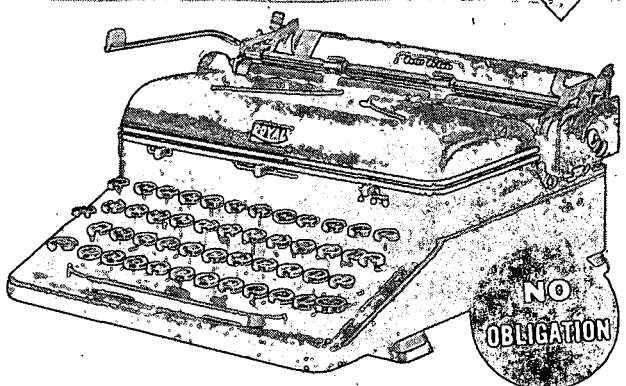

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